

THE LONDON READER

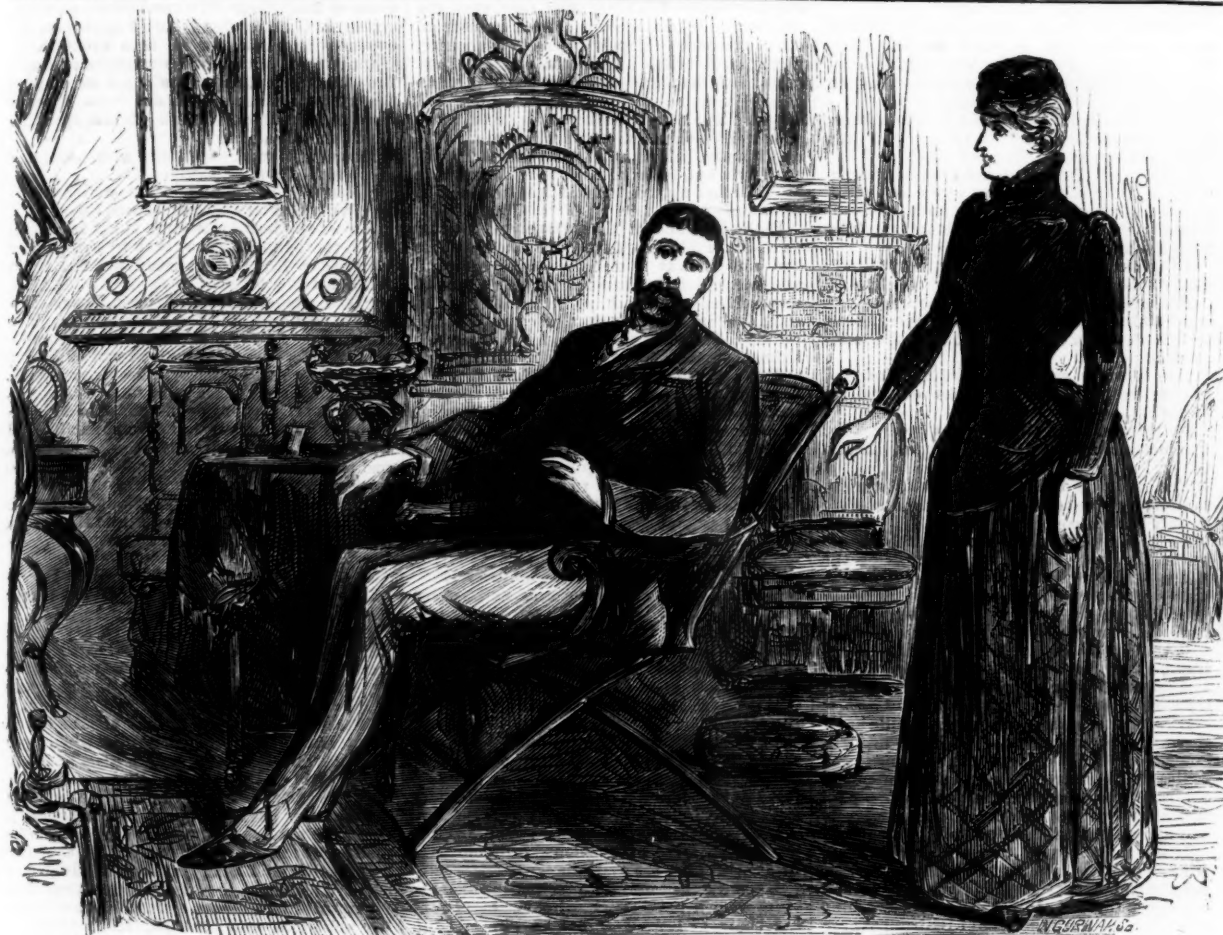
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[PHILIP WAS AWAKENED AT ONCE. THERE WAS A FAINT BUSTLING SOUND AND A FRAGRANCE AS OF PERFUME ON THE AIR.]

HER MISTAKE.

CHAPTER XI.

THE six months of Philip's probation were past and gone. He was firmly established now as Squire Dornston's responsible and only manager. He had worked well—worked bravely, for the duties he had undertaken had been no light ones, but duties that ran side by side with actual danger; and, had he chosen, Philip might have spoken of several moments in those past six months when the situation had been prime with absolute bloodshed had he not had the courage and the power to protect himself.

The Squire's affection had grown from a fancy to a certainty. He could never thank his old friend, Jim Gunter, sufficiently for the introduction of the "lad," as he called Philip, into his life, and he seemed to have a new zest in living now that he had the young man to think for him, and to be thought about.

That Philip should have succeeded so well

was a source of great satisfaction to Dr. Gunter, who felt a natural pride in showing he had not been mistaken in his mind.

Meckrington had grown accustomed to the young master, as Philip was called; and, save for one or two malcontents, who nourished their jealousy for the new man whom the Squire had put over them, he was generally liked, and certainly respected.

The women, blunt and rough all of them, had a soft spot in their hearts for the handsome, dark-eyed young fellow who rode about so fearlessly, even when popular feeling had been strongest against him. Philip had a way of speaking to these dirty creatures—more men than women—to look at them, that touched them in the most vulnerable part of their nature; and many a pit girl lost her heart to the young man, who seemed by his manner to remind her that her life could be beautified, even though she spent the most of it in a coal mine.

Every now and then the Squire ran down for a day or two, and walked about the place with Philip, delighted with all the improvements that had been effected, and knitting the

ties of his affection about the "lad" closer and closer by each visit.

Dr. Gunter appeared at Meckrington now and then, and sat chatting to Philip after dinner in his abrupt, rough way, and once Sir William Carruthers had passed through the town, and had been honestly delighted to see the young man.

The months spent at his new work had been full of honest labour, both of brain and body, and Philip was all the better for it.

The belief and trust of two men, the sweetly-proffered friendship and interest of one girl, had melted the last iron band of cynicism and pessimism, and Philip's true nature broke forth and blossomed anew.

He grew to love his work—he grew to love the uncouth, rough people about him. The days when he took a holiday, and rode out into the beautiful country beyond the tall black chimneys and the coal-dust were full of quiet, pleasant moments.

He knew Blairton and the neighbourhood well now. He had seen the widowed Lady Hampshire driving through the lanes in the summer. Once he heard that there were

guests at the Castle, and he knew without words that it must be Hope who was there, for the Countess was receiving no one.

He thought so often about the girl, and wondered how life was going with her. Now and then he read her name in some of the society journals, which the Squire sent down to Meckrington with a case of new books; and sometimes, when Dr. Gunter came, he heard her name mentioned, but beyond this Philip knew nothing about her.

To Dicky's great delight he was allowed to spend a week of his summer holidays with Mr. Leicester; but the boy was so keen about his fishing and other amusements that his sister's name rarely passed his lips.

"Hope is coming to Blairton in the autumn, so grandmamma says," he cried once, "and then, perhaps, you will see her, Philip!"

"Perhaps," Philip assented, and he wondered in a vague sort of way why this piece of news should gild the future in a pleasant fashion; "but Blairton is a long way from here, Dicky, lad."

"I think Meckrington a sumptuous place!" Dicky said, enthusiastically.

Philip had taken him down one of the mines, and let him explore and run about everywhere, to the detriment of his clothes and complexion.

The summer waned, and autumn followed in its footsteps; winter was coming on quickly.

Philip was face to face with a good deal of trouble and sorrow in Meckrington at this time.

The condition of the people was an anxiety to him; yet, try as he could, he did not see exactly how he could better it.

He had realised long ago that the agents under him were to blame for much of the misery that prevailed. He felt sure there was dishonesty among them—dishonesty not only to Mr. Dornton, but to the people; yet he scarcely knew how to deal with the matter.

It was impossible for him to arrange everything, to negotiate every little business affair; and yet he came to the conclusion that something must be done, and that quickly.

December came in bitterly cold. Philip knew there was want and starvation in many a home, and that discontent was growing apace—discontent fostered, as he felt assured, by one of these same said under-managers, with whom he had had several tussles, and who had always had to yield to him.

It was a damp, wet, cold rain, and a bitter wind, when Philip was riding out one afternoon, as much for the sake of being alone and out of the turmoil of the town as for anything else, when he heard the bells of Blairton church ringing a merry chime.

It was near the Castle grounds, and he stopped his horse to ask a passing man what was the cause of this.

"Our lady's grandchild has got a son this morning," the man answered. "The joy-bells is ringing for that."

A son! Hope a mother!

A thrill of emotion swept through Philip. It seemed to him like a dream. That fresh young girl, a child herself almost, a mother!

A pang of something like pain mingled in with his feelings.

He gave the man a shilling, and rode on quickly.

He longed to show her that he had not forgotten her at this the most supreme moment of her life.

At Meckrington Station he stopped, and sent a telegram to Covent Garden, ordering a supply of flowers to be despatched at once to Mrs. Christie at Blairton Castle.

"There will be no name, but perhaps she will guess I sent them," he said to himself, as he mounted again, and rode back to his lonely home in the smoky town.

He sat long into the night, thinking and dreaming he scarcely knew what; but when he went upstairs to his bedroom he opened a drawer that was rarely touched, and took out Hope's portrait.

He had not seen her for a year. He had only received four letters in all from her. He had not tried to gauge the truth of his feelings towards her, but to-night the truth came of its own accord.

As though it were spoken to him in silver tones he seemed to know that the change that had come upon him in the past year had had its birth in those pleasant days when Hope had sat beside his sick-bed. The reverence and chivalry he felt for women now, even the roughest and commonest of her sex, came from the same source. Hope's exquisite innocence, purity, and belief in all that was good had been the flame that had melted the iron bonds of his old cynicism and reckless indifference. Hope's friendship for him, the spur that had pushed him into action, that had made him cast his past behind him with shame and self-contempt, and led him towards a future where he could find consolation and forgetfulness in work and success.

Philip had known that there was a dual existence in his heart these months past. He had known that something—something intangible, indefinite, had walked beside him all this while, urging him, comforting him, mingling in with his thoughts and dreams, but he did not know until to-night what this influence really was.

As he gazed on Hope's lovely face, that was so lifelike, that smiled and seemed to speak, a thrill in his veins, a rush of hot blood to his heart, forced the truth home to him involuntarily. He lifted the picture to his lips, and kissed it.

"I love her," he said to himself, hoarsely. "Oh Heaven! I love her."

"You are a most perverse and annoying young person," Dr. Gunter said, austere.

Hope lifted her eyes to him and smiled faintly.

"You always let me have my own way, Gunnie, dear," she said, in a voice that was a little tired, and certainly weak.

"If I have been an old fool all this time, that is not to say I need continue to be one in the future."

"I don't call you an old fool!" Hope's voice had a touch of her old merriment now.

"I should like to hear you, madam. I should just like to hear you attempting to do any such thing, that's all!"

Dr. Gunter was walking to and fro the length of the large, old-fashioned bedroom, with his hands under his coat-tails.

Hope watched him for a moment in silence; then, with a little effort, lifted herself out of her chair and went across to him—a frail, lovely young creature, in her pale-pink dressing-gown.

"Gunnie, dear!" she said, imploringly, as she put her arms about her old friend.

Dr. Gunter wrapped her in a close embrace. "What you ask is impossible, my child—quite impossible," he said gently.

"If I wrapped up ever so warm and was carried to the train like a mummy!"

"It is not to be done, fairy."

"It is not so very cold," Hope said eagerly, "and I am quite, quite strong."

Dr. Gunter smoothed her brown hair away from her brows.

"My dear little one," he said tenderly, "you know I would refuse you nothing in reason; but to dream of even letting you put your nose outside this room for the next week would be absolutely mad, if not criminal."

Hope's lips quivered.

"I—I did want to spend Christmas in my home," she said, in a low way, with a quick sigh.

"Are you not at home here, fairy?"

"You know I love Blairton, I love grandmamma, but I yearn to be in my own home. I promised Hugh I would spend Christmas with Miss Gunnie, dear!"

"And so you shall!" Dr. Gunter said, promptly. "Christie shall come to you."

Hope grew a shade paler.

"You—you know he will not come here. He—he is hurt with grandmamma!"

Dr. Gunter frowned to himself. "It is not a time to remember such things, and so you will find, my fairy, when Christie hears from me that you are not fit to leave your room."

Hope shook her head.

"I—I am afraid it will vex him. He has been so good. It was good of him to let me come to Blairton at all when he was so hurt, wasn't it not Gunnie, dear? And I appreciate his goodness so much, for he is a proud man, Gunnie, and you know he must have sacrificed his feelings to let me come here under the circumstances. I—I did hope I could have gone to him. Think of his spending Christmas all alone!"

The wistful, violet eyes filled with tears, and Hope turned away quickly.

"Now I will have no nonsense and no fretting," Dr. Gunter declared, shortly.

He was obliged to let some of his irritation find a vent, and he knew that to sympathise with her in her present mood was the worst thing to do.

"You are a child no longer, Hope. You have sacred duties and responsibilities. You are a mother now, and you must remember your child. Do you think you will be acting lightly if you willfully jeopardise your health, nay, even your life, for a mere girlish whim, and so deprive your boy of your care and protection? The matter is an impossibility. I will myself write this afternoon to Christie, and tell him the facts of the case. I suppose a letter to the club will find him quickest."

Hope said "yes" in a quiet way, and with one glance at her, full of love and something like grief, Dr. Gunter went away to write the letter.

It wanted two days to Christmas. Hope's baby was three weeks old, and yet his father had not even seen him.

Hope's tears flowed slowly down her cheek; her disappointment was not to be expressed in words. She had counted each day as it went by; she had struggled so hard to be strong and well in time to travel up to town and Hugh.

It seemed to her years since she had seen him. She scarcely knew how she had lived since she had left Lady Anne's little house in the country and travelled to Blairton.

It was such a bitter grief to her, this quarrel between her grandmother and her husband. She did not even know rightly what the quarrel was about. She only knew that one day, in the middle of the season, Hugh had come to her in a towering rage, saying that Hampshire had chosen to insult him through her solicitors, and that he, Hugh Christie, would never speak to or enter the old Countess's house again.

Hope had soothed him all she could with her pretty loving words and ways. It was a terrible grief to her, and she feared at first that Hugh would insist on her absenting herself from her grandmother also, but this Hugh had no intention of doing.

There was too much to be gained by cementing the bond between Lady Hampshire and Hope, and Hugh was not likely to forget that. He did not go into particulars about the quarrel; he said something vaguely about business, and Hope was content to let the matter rest.

She was only sorry her eyes should have been red and tear-stained when Brenda came in the afternoon to go out driving with her, and she hoped she had made a good story of the trouble to her step-sister.

Brenda understood matters perfectly. She knew at once that it was a question of money, and that it was thin edge of the wedge.

"She has behaved like a fool, of course, and signed away something, that's very certain!" she said to herself contemptuously. "The old woman resents it equally, of course, and the end will be that Hope will quarrel with her, too, on Hugh's account, and then she will have done for herself, for her money won't last

him long, and she cannot look to her grandmother then to help her."

Brenda had worked her way with marvelous cleverness. She made herself so pleasant, and was so full of worldly knowledge and wisdom, that Hope speedily forgot all her old cause for grievance against her step-sister, and extended the hand of affection to her warmly and sincerely.

Hugh had been gratified by Brenda's manner, and his vanity was fed in a dozen different ways by her clever brain.

She had gone everywhere with Hope, and had received several offers of marriage, but none that came up to her ambition and desire.

She could afford to wait a little longer, however, she told herself. Her sojourn with Hope—for after a time Lady Carruthers was permitted to return to Thickthorn, and Brenda went to stay with the newly-married couple, had worked marvels in her favour; and for this reason, if for no other, Brenda refrained from doing anything which might jeopardise the position she was building up for herself.

The end of Hope's happiness would not be long in coming, she told herself.

This quarrel with Lady Hampshire was but a shadow of what would follow; and she knew both Hugh Christie and Hope too well not to be assured that the one would break the other's heart as easily as she killed a fly.

Before that came, however, Brenda meant to be settled in life, and to be enabled to leave Hope to fight out her battle alone.

It was at Cowes that Brenda met the man she intended to marry. The idea came to her all at once—it was a veritable inspiration.

She had gone with the Christies on board a yacht, which some man had lent them—placed at Hugh's disposal, had Hope only known it, for the sake of her lovely face and sweet eyes, and there Brenda met the man about whom she had thought and read so much—the celebrated Marquis of Gainsborough himself.

As she watched the stately old man pay court to Hope, who smiled and blushed at him in her pretty fashion, Brenda had suddenly conceived the idea of becoming his wife.

It was a madness she felt at that moment; but somehow, as she reviewed the position, her hopes grew.

She knew the title was a poor one, that of late the Gainsborough estates had grown poorer. She knew the Marquis hated his eldest son and his heir, and he felt sure he despised Hugh Christie.

It was a phenomenal plan to arrange, and Brenda scarcely saw her way to its fulfilment; but Brenda Grant was a clever woman, and possessed of enormous will-power. At least, she would not despair until she was forced to do so.

The mere thought of success made her feel faint. What a triumph! What a glory!

Where would Hope be then compared to her? What would not the world say, and how every woman would envy her her proud position!

Once planted in her brain, the thought grew and grew, until Brenda saw no future, dreamed no dream, save the one that should give her the triumph she desired!

She watched, listened, questioned, pondered on all subjects connected with Lord Gainsborough; and when she found he was then engaged on some erudite translation from the Greek, she set herself the task of learning the dead language in question, and preparing for the moment when she would arrest and claim the statesman's attention.

Hope used often to wonder why Brenda would retire to her cabin and pore over books and pamphlets. And once, when Brenda's name had been mentioned before the Marquis as an exceptionally gifted woman, Hope had seconded this warmly.

"Brenda is so clever there is hardly anything she does not know. She is a splendid Greek and Latin scholar, and speaks and writes half a dozen other languages!"

"The tailor was lavish in the question of education, it seems!" Hugh had said lightly. Lord Gainsborough had made no remark, only he looked at Brenda with interest when she came on deck—a very ordinary example of a smart young woman.

Had she paraded her knowledge Brenda would never have attracted a second look from the courtly old statesman, but she knew better than to act so foolishly. She waited her moment in which to let her cleverness find a proper vent.

"Gad! I do believe the old fellow is going in for a flirtation with Brenda!" Hugh Christie had said, half-laughingly, half-vexedly, to Hope.

He was piqued at Brenda's indifference to him, and was annoyed that his kinsman should find more attraction in Miss Grant than in Hope.

He was not likely to understand Lord Gainsborough, and certainly he would have been astonished could he have known how much interest Hope provoked in the Marquis's mind.

She was languid, and not very strong. The yachting was almost too much for her, and yet Hope clung to it, for she dreaded the separation from Hugh.

It was decided she was to go to Blairton, that her baby should be born there, and the Countess had sent Captain Christie a cold, though courteous, invitation to be with his wife.

Naturally Hugh declined it. He had no desire to have any conversation with Lady Hampshire; and, moreover, he would have yawned himself to death at Blairton, with no one but a delicate girl for companion.

Hugh Christie spent a delightful autumn. He went to Thickthorn ostensibly to please Hope—in reality, for the hunting; and in flying about from one country-house to another the time went very rapidly.

And now Christmas was come, and Hope was too frail to travel up to London to join him; and she knew too well that, though Dr. Gunter were to write a dozen times, Hugh would not come to Blairton unless, indeed, it were a question of life or death.

"It is his pride!" The poor child said to herself. "I—I should be just the same. Grandmamma must have hurt him terribly. I will speak to her when I am stronger, and see if I cannot set it right. He—he must be proud. That is right; but oh! Hugh—Hugh, my darling! I want you so badly, I long for you! I feel I do not live without seeing you. The disappointment is more than I can bear!"

And then Hope's courage gave way, and she burst into tears.

CHAPTER XII.

Philip caught a heavy cold at Christmas-time, and had he listened to his housekeeper he would have remained in the house if not in bed; but Philip had too much to occupy his mind at this moment.

The new year was not a fortnight old before the grumbling discontent among the people took shape and form, and a strike was only a matter of hours.

Philip tried all in his power to avert this. He went to meetings of the men—meetings held at the pit's mouth. He tried to counsel, to argue, but in vain. The poison of the agitator had worked its way too well, and the women and children would have to suffer and starve until the antidote of pain and sorrow would work out the poison.

Philip, worn out in brain and body, and sick at heart for the trouble he saw coming, and was powerless to avert, made his way home one January afternoon, and flinging in his chair before the fire, succumbed to the warmth and the weakness his cold had brought, and fell asleep.

He was awakened softly all at once. There was a faint rustling sound, and a fragrance as of perfume on the air.

He sprang to his feet rather unsteadily. "I am so sorry, Mr. Leicester," Hope said, quickly. "I thought I should get away without disturbing you. Your housekeeper showed me in here, and said you would be home shortly. I thought I would wait a little while. I wanted to see you before I went away, and so—so I came to you"—Hope blushed a little—"as you will never come to Blairton."

Philip was holding her small hand in his. Was it a dream? he asked himself, or did she really stand before him like some lovely angel, in her furs and soft velvet cap on her red-brown hair?

"You came to see me? How good of you!" he said, hurriedly, and then he woke up and drew her to the fire. "You will stop a few moments? Rachel will be very grievously disappointed if you don't have some tea; and you will forgive my untidy room and my more untidy apparel, Mrs. Christie."

"I think your room is sweet, and as for your dress—well, I will find one fault, Mr. Leicester." Hope put on a most matronly air. "How wrong of you to sit in those damp clothes when you have such a dreadful cold! Please—please go and change them at once. No, I refuse to speak to you until you have obeyed me. You always used to obey me, you know, and so I am sure you will now; and, please, will you tell Rachel I shall enjoy some tea immensely. I am going to give you a visitation, Mr. Leicester. The carriage is not coming back for me for half-an-hour, but I shall leave you immediately if you don't go and change your things?"

Philip was upstairs only five minutes. He scarcely knew whether he lived or dreamed. The whole atmosphere of the house was changed. A breath of summer seemed to have defied the bitter cold, and to have crept in to cheer and warm him. The worry and perplexity of the moment vanished in her presence, as the snow melts before the sun. He found his pulses thrilling, and his whole frame trembling from excitement and exquisite pleasure mingled.

Hope had thrown off her seal-skin coat, and was busy chatting to Rachel when he came down.

"I have left all sorts of directions for your treatment," she said, looking at him with a smile. "Remember, I am an old married woman and am privileged!"

"I have been nurturing all sorts of unkind thoughts about you," she added after awhile when he had poured out tea, and brought a cup to her. "You never write to me, Mr. Leicester, and you would not come to dinner the other night. Grandmamma says you have never accepted any invitation from Blairton, which is really very unneighbourly of you!"

Philip coloured.

"I am a working man, and society is not for me," he said, hurriedly.

"Blairton is not society, and I like working men, so does her ladyship." Hope changed her tone. "I wish," she said, gently, "as a great favour to me, that you would go and see my grandmother now and then. I feel sure you would both grow so fond of one another, and it would be a charity on your part, Mr. Leicester. You can spare an afternoon sometimes?"

"I would do anything for you," Philip said lightly, she little knew how much earnestness lay beneath the words.

"And you will take care of yourself? You know you have an awful cough, and you look so thin. I shall tell Annie he must prescribe for you, Mr. Leicester."

It was new and sweet to him to have this thought expressed for him, coming from her. It pained him even while it gave him joy.

It seemed to him as though some fairy had come into his home, and by a touch of her wand, transformed it entirely.

It was so beautiful and so strange to see her sitting there by the fire, her sweet face flushed into dangerous loveliness, her voice sounding like angels' music in his ears. He lived in the ecstasy of the moment. The

awakening would be terrible when she was gone.

They talked of all sorts of things, of the past year. He told her of his work, of his hopes and struggles, and Hope listened eagerly.

"How good he is, how noble! He has the face of a hero!" Hope was contrasting him unconsciously with the men she had met in her London sojourn. There was something strong and noble and magnificent to her in this man's browned hands and face tanned by sun, wind, and rain.

"He is a man," she said to herself. "There is something about him that inspires comfort and protection. I am glad I have met him again. Second impressions are sometimes unsatisfactory, but not with him. I like him better now than I did last year."

When she rose to go at length she pointed to her little hand.

"You see your ring!" she said, with a smile. "It has never left my finger."

His heart thrilled within him.

"A friend could hope for no more than that," he said, in a low voice.

"And you are my friend," Hope said, putting out both her hands to him in her simple, frank fashion. "Do you know that I have often and often derived much pleasure in that thought, Mr. Leicester?"

He stooped his head reverently and kissed those little hands, tokens of her liking for and belief in him.

"Think of me sometimes in the future," he said, not quite steadily. "Our lives are not likely to cross much, our paths lie in different directions. But oh! my dear, if ever you should need a friend in any way small or great, you need only send me word. I will be with you."

Hope drove him to Blairton with a curious feeling in her heart.

"I wish I could give him happiness," she said to herself. "He is so good he should be happy. A friend, ah! that I am sure he will be, and I will take him at his word if ever I should need one; but," the colour flushed into her face, "but I need no friend while I have Hugh, my dear, my most beloved husband!"

The Dornton colliers went out on strike the day following Hope's visit to Philip; and, as if to flaunt and jeer at the poor weak and ailing ones among the vast population that had their living in the mines, the weather became intensely cold—more bitter and severe than it had been through the winter so far.

Philip's heart ached within him for the misery that he knew must follow on this strike, and his temper rose as he went through the streets thronged with men and women, who should have been hard at work under usual circumstances, and read the dogged, sullen expression on their faces.

The cause of all this unhappiness was full of satisfaction and vulgar triumph. Philip knew that this agitator, this spouter of socialistic principles, was at heart the biggest humbug and hypocrite the world could produce; and he did not hesitate to put his thoughts into words when he met Bradley beaming with triumph, and rushing about encouraging the men to persevere in their action.

Bradley had already written, tendering his resignation to Mr. Dornton's head manager, and Philip had consequently no hold over the man, no argument but charity and common-sense to plead with the successful agitation.

Two weeks of misery and starvation passed. Philip wrote as hopefully as he could to the Squire. In truth, the situation was not so dark, and the strike would have ended almost immediately—in fact, it would never have begun, but for Bradley and a knot of malcontents, who were ready to grumble on the smallest provocation.

Philip had received more than one deputation of weeping women, who entreated him to use his influence with the men. He was extremely popular. His fearlessness, his bold,

straightforward manner, his honesty of purpose and speech, had won for him a firm hold on the affections of the rough folk about him. Philip had done his best, however; he had argued, pleaded, commanded, all to no purpose.

The men were obdurate; they demanded an enormous increase of pay. The Squire, had he been permitted, would doubtless have given in to the demand; but the influence of other coalowners forbade this, and he could do nothing but supply Philip with a large sum of money for private assistance to the people, and to help the women through the trouble. It was a pit girl who gave Philip his cue to work upon.

"It's all the fault 'o that mon," she cried, fiercely through her tears. "It's nowt but yon Bradley as is to blame! Lord, but I'd smash him to smithereens if I'd got th' chance!"

Philip knit his brow over this.

"It is worth trying," he said to himself; and put on his hat and coat, and rode through the town in search of his late collaborator in business.

The Dornton Colliery strike was ended. The newspapers teemed with accounts of it.

"By Jove, that manager was a proper sort of chap!" Hugh Christie said to Hope, as he sat at breakfast reading the paper. "He went for the fellow who was making all the mischief. Gave him a chance of putting an end to the business, and, finding him obstinate, called him a coward, and finished by thrashing him like a dog! We want a few more like this Leicester! By George! he has done old Thornton a good stroke of business. The men went back to their work like lambs the same day!"

"I always told you, darling, what a nice man Mr. Leicester was!" Hope said, with a flush on her cheeks.

"Oh! of course it's the same chap who had such a spill at Thickthorn last winter!" Hugh put down the paper, and yawned prodigiously. "I always thought there was a soft spot in your heart for him, Hope."

Hope flushed, and then paled.

"I wish, darling," she said eagerly, quickly, "you would not say such a thing, even—even in jest."

"What! have I tumbled on an old romance!" asked Hugh with a laugh, as he rose and lit a cigar. "Well, I promise not to be inquisitive. We all have something of the sort."

Hope was silent. It was not the first time her husband had jarred her sensitive nerves, and made her heart contract by some such idle words. Hope's love was so intense, her belief in the purity, grandeur and endurance of love was so great, it was a pain to her to hear Hugh indulge in these laughing remarks.

It seemed to her to be wrong. It made her miserable—miserable with a vague sort of foreboding that there would come an end to her belief, and that some painful, distressing truth must reach her in time. It hurt her that he should jest on what was to her such a sacred point; but she said no more, and Hugh went out of the room, yawning again, and wishing that Hope would develop some powers for amusing him and making his home life more entertaining. She was all very well, a pretty, gentle little thing—an immaculate wife, a perfect mother, but took life too seriously; and she had long since grown a doubtful blessing in Hugh's eyes, more especially since the disagreeable episode about the transfer of her money. There would be another and a worse moment coming when Lady Hampshire became aware that Hope had given up the whole of her capital to her husband's administration. Hugh shrugged his shoulders.

"I was a fool to get married," he said to himself, with as near an approach to ill-temper as ever affected him. "And being obliged to do that, I was certainly a double fool not to have chosen Brenda Grant instead of Hope. Brenda and I would have got on very well. We understand the world, and would have gone our own

ways without any further bother. I shall have to despatch Hope to the country as frequently as possible. The child's health will be an excellent excuse, and she hates London."

Captain Christie's ill-temper began to vanish at this thought. "Life is too short to be bored," he said, as he entered his club; and acting on this precept, he at once sat down and accepted an invitation (which he found awaiting him) to a Bohemian supper party that night; and in the pursuit of other such congenial occupation throughout the day he managed to forget the wearisome remembrance of his marital duties and responsibilities.

(To be continued.)

ETHEL'S FLIRTATION.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.—(continued.)

"HAVE you no recollection of what transpired at your bedside the hour after you were brought home from the fire?" Ethel asked.

"No," Harry said, wonderingly. "The opiates given to me made me unconscious."

"Then I will proceed to enlighten you, and as briefly as possible," said Ethel, continuing. "You took opiates, as you say, but instead of making you unconscious you were delirious, declaring over and over again that your last hour had come, that you knew you were dying, you knew my father to be a lawyer, and begged him to draw up papers then and there, deeding everything you possessed—to me. This was accordingly done, and you eagerly signed the documents. Thus the affair now stands—you have not a shilling in the world—I, your wife, own all! If I chose to turn you from the house you would go into the street—a beggar! You can rave, call it a conspiracy, do what you will, the fact remains the same."

Harry turned suddenly and faced her with an expression on his face that fairly electrified her, it was so terrible.

"If it is indeed true that you have inveigled me into so dastardly a scheme, taking advantage of my condition, I say this, that in this hour I leave the house—leave you, leave everything, and go out into the street what you have made me—a beggar! From this hour I shall never look upon your face again. I have known before all the privations of poverty, and they taught me how to battle manfully with the world; that knowledge will serve me well now. I can work for my daily bread—I have no fear of toil, thank Heaven."

"You—you would not—you could not leave me. Think what the world would say!" gasped Ethel.

"You would have my wealth to compensate you," he replied, with a bitter laugh.

"Listen, Harry," she sobbed, creeping up to him and laying her trembling hand on his arm. "Promise me you will abandon your intention of lending aid to Annie—my foe—and I will sign everything back to you—every shilling, Harry! Let her go to prison for burning down The Fire! What is that to us?"

"It is just this to me," cried Harry Venn, hoarsely, "if my life was the price asked to save Annie and prove her innocence, I would give it, being thankful that it was in my power to do so. Can you think, then, that I would make any such arrangement as the one you stipulate? No—a thousand times, no!"

"Then it is because you love Annie yet—in spite of all!" screamed Ethel. "Is it not so? Answer me—I have a right to know—you owe it to me!"

"You shall know the truth, Ethel, since you ask it," he said. "Although wedded to you, every throb of my heart goes out to—Annie! I have fought the greatest battles with myself that man ever fought to overcome, to—root it from my soul, but to no purpose. I have been true and faithful to you, and I shall

over be true, but now that you know the exact state of my heart you will not regret my going. I shall—"

The sentence was never finished, the new nurse whom the doctor had sent coming into the apartment.

"Come into my boudoir; we will talk the matter over there," said Ethel, excitedly. "You must—you shall!"

Rather than make a scene, Harry permitted Ethel to take him from the room; but she noticed, when he reached the doorway, how he paused and looked back at the white face lying against the pillow.

His lips moved, but from them came no sound.

The glance Ethel cast back at Annie was one of malignant hate.

"She will not live until to-morrow," was the thought that flashed through her brain.

But as for Annie herself, who shall picture how the scene which we have just described affected her? She was not unconscious, as both Ethel and Harry had supposed.

The half-closed eyes, so nearly veiled by the long sweeping lashes, beheld them distinctly even in the dim light, and she heard clearly every word that had been uttered.

No words can portray the agony that the girl had endured when the officers had entered the room, and she learned their cruel mission.

She tried with superhuman efforts to shake off the lethargy that had stolen over her, numbing every faculty. The blood in her veins seemed turned to ice, and to rest heavy as lead around her heart.

Was it a trance that had infolded her in its icy clasp?

She tried to cry out, to move; but not one pulse-beat answered her frantic efforts. She could not even lift her heavy eyelids if her life had been at stake.

Was she dying? she wondered.

Oh, Heaven! oh, guardian angels who watched over her, how she prayed to them! How she beseeched Heaven, as she lay so silently there, for the power to move hand or foot, or utter one word!

Was she dying, and she so young and life so sweet?

The charge which the officers brought against her of burning The Firs filled her very soul with the keenest terror. Surely they would not drag her off to prison for it! Ethel, the guilty one, would interfere and save her.

But when she heard the conversation a little later between Ethel and Harry, and heard Ethel so openly and daringly accuse her, all hope died in her despairing bosom. Ah! would an angry, outraged Heaven ever find pardon for Ethel!

The only balm that fell upon her heart was the wonderful knowledge that Harry did not abhor her, as Ethel had always led her to believe; and the knowledge that he regretted having parted from her brought with it more pain than pleasure, for Harry was another's now, and it was a sin in the sight of Heaven to allow one tender thought to rest an instant in her heart for one whom another woman claimed.

Ethel's treachery to Harry filled her with the keenest dismay. Ah! how different she would have been! She would never have taken such a dastardly advantage of him to get him into her power. She would rather have given him a dozen fortunes, if she had had them, than take one from him. If she died he would never know that; but what did it matter now?

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE people of the village were greatly startled when the news was spread broadcast that it was Annie who had been taken from The Firs when it was wrapped in a winding-sheet of flame, but the consternation ran still higher when the story leaked out that Annie had been Harry's bride, and that they had parted on their wedding-day; that she had come to The Firs on that fatal night, an un-

bidden guest, whom no one saw enter; and the people shook their heads when poor Annie's arrest followed, charged with arson, so quickly on the heels of it.

Those who remembered her from her babyhood up as a shy, timid, flaxen-haired child, and still later, a sweet and modest young girl, were emphatic in their belief that she had never set fire to The Firs.

But the idle scandal-mongers, who are always ready to believe any ill they may hear of a lovely, defenceless woman, told each other that the proving of her guilt was only a question of time, as it was a plain case that jealousy most intense had taken possession of her and prompted her to the terrible deed, and they felt no pity in their hearts for her.

The news was astounding to old Richard Wells, the miller. He heard it first at the village tavern, where all of his friends had congregated—as they do in little hamlets—to discuss all the affairs of the village folk, and especially any great calamity that happened in their midst.

With a face white as marble, the old miller hurried home to his wife.

She had commenced to berate him soundly for keeping the supper waiting, but she stopped short when she saw his white face.

"Great Heaven, Richard!" she cried, agast, "what can be the matter? You look as white as a ghost! Has anything gone amiss at the mill? Has the dam broken, or—"

He cut short her queries with a deep groan, as he sunk into the nearest seat.

"It's about—Annie," he said, huskily, and the great lump that rose in his throat choked all further utterance.

"Well, what about the girl?" exclaimed his wife, stopping short with her dishing-up of the soup, and looking at him with angry eyes.

"What of her, I say?"

"I wish to Heaven she had never left us, wife!" he sobbed, and tears that were no shame to his manhood coursed down his rugged cheeks.

"Will you tell me what you are talking about, Richard Wells?" cried his wife, sharply.

"What do you mean by this extraordinary acting? If it's to coax me to take back that niece o' yours, I tell you pretty plainly that your new plan has failed. I shall never let her cross this threshold—never, I say!"

"Stop!" cried the miller, hoarsely—"stop and listen to me. Heaven has taken vengeance upon us for what we have already done to Annie. You turned the poor girl out into the cold world. Now ask Heaven to pardon you for what has come of it!"

It was the first time in a life-time that he had ever dared to speak out his mind fully, freely, and censoriously to his irate wife.

No wonder she stopped short, looking askance at him with wide open eyes.

"Will you tell me what you are driving at?" she cried out again, in exasperation. "You would try the patience of a saint! What about Annie? Has she written to you, begging to be taken back, the vixen?"

He raised his haggard face, and the mournful expression in his eyes haunted her for a long day afterwards.

"No, it isn't a letter from little Annie—she can't come back to us now," he sobbed, burying his face in his hands.

"Will you stop making a downright idiot of yourself and tell me what you are sniveling about?" cried the irate woman. "Is—is the girl—dead?"

He shook his head, and by degrees she drew the whole story from him, and when he had finished she was mute with dismay.

"If you hadn't turned her out o'-doors on that cold winter night all that wouldn't 'a happened," he groaned.

"I'm not sorry I did it," declared the miller's wife, angrily. She drove me to do it, didn't she?"

"You might 'a been more patient and bore a little with the girl," he sobbed. "Annie wasn't a bad girl."

"She was like her mother—a mad will-o'-

the-wisp," declared the miller's wife, seeking to defend her action in some manner.

"Don't say that," he cried. "Annie was no will-o'-the-wisp. I feel that I am responsible for all that has happened, Jane," he groaned, rising hastily from his chair and pacing excitedly up and down the meagre little room. "It seems only yesterday since the night her poor young mother died. You remember her. You wasn't very kind to poor little Annie's young mother, for you wouldn't let her come in. You kept her on the doorstep with her poor little baby in her arms. I told you then she didn't look well."

"What is the use bringing all that up now?" muttered the miller's wife. "We will let that pass."

"I want to remind you of what happened that night," he said, sternly.

"She called to me piteously, and instead of bringing her in I went out to her. Would to Heaven it had to be done over again! My conscience smites me even now when I think how I went out to her and sat beside her on the cold doorstep."

"Dear old brother," she sobbed, lifting her poor wan face to my rugged one, "I will not come in if your wife doesn't want me; I do not want to make trouble between you and her—ah, no, Heaven forbid! But I have come a long way to see you. I—I came because the doctors told me I couldn't live, and I couldn't die without seeing you."

"I—I have brought you a precious charge, brother," she went on; "you must not refuse to accept it, for she will have no other relative than you when I am gone," and she drew from her shawl a tiny little babe, and laid the tender little wee thing in my great strong arms."

"Promise me you will look after her when I am gone, brother Richard," she whispered, "and it will make death easier for me to contemplate."

"I'll do it," I answered. I couldn't bear to see the great tear-drops standing in those pretty, wistful blue eyes o' hers. You know I'd look after the child if anything were to happen to you," I said.

"You will have to plead with Jane to be good to my poor little innocent babe," she sobbed; "and as you deal with her so may Heaven deal with you. Tell Jane that is my dying message to her. Ah, my poor little child! How hard it will be for you to walk through life without a mother's guidance and watchful care, the path is so hard and so weary for a young girl!"

"There's no need to bring all that up now, after all these years," muttered the miller's wife, huskily, wiping a suspicious moisture from the corners of her eyes with her gingham apron.

"I want to remind you how poorly we kept our trust," he said, slowly. "You were not kind to Alicia's little child, and Heaven help me, I blame myself that I loved you to wreak your abominable temper on the girl's defenceless head!"

For once in her life the miller's wife was taken too thoroughly by surprise to find her tongue, and for the first time something like fear and respect stirred her heart for the man who dared break through the submission of long years and speak his own mind at last.

"I ask pardon from Heaven that I allowed you to do as you did to that helpless little child," he continued, his wrath rising higher with every word. "Your turning her out into the storm on that bitter cold winter night was the last act in the list of your cruelties to her, and I say it is on your head—the trouble she is now in."

"Oh, if it were to be done over again, Richard," she sobbed, "I'd do different—I'd be a mother to poor Annie. It breaks my heart to hear of her lying there so ill, and she under arrest at that."

"Would to Heaven that she would die just where she is!" sobbed the miller.

"She must not—she shall not die!" cried Jane Wells. "In the sight of Heaven I will repair the mischief I have done. I will save

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her, and establish her innocence of the awful crime of which she is accused, or die in making the attempt."

Richard Wells reached out and grasped her hard toil-worn hand, and he leaned over and kissed her as he had not kissed her since the early days when they were first wed, and the action caused Jane's heart to beat with a pleasure so great it was almost pain.

Her hard face softened, and tears ran down her cheeks.

"You are a noble woman, Jane," he said, "a kinder, dearer heart than I ever knew of or dreamed of beats in your bosom."

She looked up at him and smiled through her tears. It was sweet, after all, to be in unison with her husband's thoughts, and to hear such words from his lips.

"No matter how dark it looks just now for poor little Annie I will save her if it lays within human power, Richard," she said. "Come, get your hat and start. We must go to her at once. In this hour of need we must be at her bedside. In the hour of sickness or death Annie may always depend upon me. I shall save her, never fear, Richard."

CHAPTER XL.

THE condition of Annie puzzled the doctors the whole country round. They all agreed that it was a comatose state in which she lay, and not death. But how it would end no one cared to predict, and those who saw the officer pace the corridor before her door night and day said to each other, with tears of pity in their eyes, that Heaven would indeed be kind to let the girl die rather than face the fate before her.

While they watched in silence over Annie stormy scenes were taking place in another part of the house between Harry and Ethel.

He had been proof against all her entreaties to remain, and it completely unnerved Ethel to see the servants go steadily on with the packing of his effects.

Mr. Whiteley and his handsome young son-in-law held a long and bitter interview, and Ethel's mother added her tears and entreaties to those of her daughter in endeavouring to recall the mischief that had been done, but all to no purpose. Harry was firm in his resolve to leave Ethel and go out into the world—a beggar, as she had expressed it.

The manner in which he had been duped and led into signing his entire wealth over to Ethel seemed inexorable to him, and he told the family in very plain language just what he thought of a wife and a lawyer who would connive to take advantage of a man lying ill and delirious in permitting him to sign such a document.

When entreaties failed to move him Ethel resorted to hysterical tears.

"What would the world think, Harry, if you left me?" she cried, flinging herself at his feet and clinging to him wildly. "I would die of shame. You must spare me. Stay, only stay, and I will sign back every shilling to you to do as you please with. You—you can spend every farthing of it on that woman's trial if you like. You said you would remain if I signed it back, and now, Harry, I hold you to your promise," she sobbed, frantically.

Her grief was so intense that Harry was troubled as to what the outcome would be if he followed out the plan that he had mapped out for himself.

At last, very reluctantly, he allowed her to have her own way, and, true to her promise, despite her father's secret advice, Ethel signed back to her husband all of his possessions again.

Mr. Whiteley's wrath knew no bounds, and he and his daughter had a bitter quarrel over the matter that night.

"In one moment you have overthrown the sharpest scheme that I ever planned and carried out successfully," he cried. "I have told you repeatedly that when a husband's love is on the wane a woman's only chance of keeping him from deserting her altogether is to get his

property under her control. Then she has the reins in her own hands, and can curb him at will," he added, grimly.

"But you did not tell me that Harry would leave me if I did it," said Ethel, with a miserable little sob.

"Well, what if he had done so?" retorted the lawyer, sharply. "Wouldn't you have had nearly half-a-million of money to have recompensed you? What more do you women want, anyhow?"

"All the money in the world would not recompense me for the loss of Harry, papa," she said, adding slowly: "And if your plan had been the means of sending him from me I should have hated you for ever, were you twenty times over my father."

"Do any great favour for a woman in her interest, instead of her husband's, and she will turn about and despise you for it every time," returned the lawyer. "But I wash my hands of the whole affair," he went on, "and whatever comes of it you have yourself to thank for giving him the opportunity of deserting you if he feels so inclined. Remember, you would always have been sure of him if you had the money—he wouldn't have gone far I can tell you?"

"Harry is different from most men, papa," persisted Ethel, "and you ought to know it. Finding himself suddenly poor, his pride would have sent him away from me, if nothing else."

"Well, you have signed it back again, so there's the end of the matter," declared Mr. Whiteley. "I can only add that I hope you will never regret it. I shall watch narrowly what he does, now that power has been restored to him."

Mr. Whiteley was not surprised to learn his son-in-law's first action was to retain the services of the most eminent doctors in the country to combine their skill in the attempt to save Annie's life.

When the fifth day had passed, and there was no change in the girl's condition, the doctors had but one reply as to what her fate would probably be—she would sink quietly into that deep sleep that knows no awakening, and they hoped from the bottom of their hearts that this would be the case.

But in this they were doomed to disappointment. On the morning of the sixth day the spell was broken and the life blood drifted slowly back through the ice-cold veins. The council of wise doctors shook their heads in solemn awe, and whispered that it was—life!

The nurse who stood near them uttered a fervent "Thank Heaven!"

The great glad tidings were received with fervent thankfulness by the miller and his wife. Mrs. Venn laid her head on her son's breast and wept in silence when she heard of it, and Harry—how shall we portray what his feelings were? He looked up at the white clouds in the blue sky through the open window and silently thanked Heaven for granting the prayer he had been petitioning for ever since the fatal night of the fire—that poor little Annie's young life would be spared.

Mr. Whiteley and his wife and Ethel heard it in utter silence, and no one dreamed, save Harry, that they would rather have heard of her death.

The village folk watched the case with breathless anxiety, realising that it would be only a question of a short time now ere the girl would be removed to the county jail, there to await her trial for the burning of The Firs. So great was the excitement that the officials were compelled to accomplish the removal by night in order to avoid the excited crowds.

It was a trying time for Harry Venn. Those days seemed to have absorbed all the brightness from his bonny handsome face and left it wonderfully grave and pale, and many a silver thread found its way among the fair locks clustering over his broad brow.

He had engaged the services of one of the most eloquent lawyers that money could procure; but the gentleman had told him

candidly that it was his opinion that nothing could save the girl, for the evidence against her was woven into a strong chain of circumstantial evidence which pointed to her guilt.

The most pitiful circumstance that ever could have occurred had happened to poor Annie—she had lost her mind completely. Up to the day of her marriage with Harry and the evening which had followed when she had been so bitterly jealous of her husband of a few hours trying over new duets at the piano with Ethel, and how she had hurriedly left the room, going out into the grounds to sob her heart out under the pitying trees, she remembered well, but from that fatal moment everything was a blank to her.

How she came to be in the tower of The Firs, and what she was doing there, the poor girl could not even conjecture.

When Annie had awakened from her trance, she quite believed that it was still her wedding-day with Harry; and it would have broken a heart of stone to have heard her murmur the name of her young husband, and seen to hold out her arms to Harry as he stood by her bedside.

Then she looked around in bewilderment at the strange faces and strange surroundings about her.

It fell to the lot of Mrs. Venn to break by degrees the whole story to Annie, that she was no longer Harry's wife, that Ethel was in her place, and all the events just as the good woman knew them, up to that hour.

Poor Annie's agony knew no bounds, and her horror upon hearing that she was under arrest for the burning of The Firs was heart-rending.

The girl grasped Mrs. Venn's hand and begged her to believe her when she said before Heaven and her angel mother that she felt quite sure in her own heart that she could never have done it.

"You think you did not do it," sobbed the dear old lady, her poor old heart fairly wrung with grief for Annie, "but you are not quite sure. Ah, Annie, how much those words mean!"

"You say the evidence is all against me," whispered Annie, looking up at her with great dilated eyes.

Harry's mother nodded dumbly. "And do the people—the village folk, I mean who have known me all my life—do they think me guilty?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Ah, Annie, child, how can I answer you?" cried Mrs. Venn, distressedly. "You are breaking my heart."

"You must answer me by telling the truth," said Annie, in a low voice; adding: "Do they think I did it?"

"Yes," sobbed Mrs. Venn, "most people believe so."

"And what would they do with me if they felt sure that I was guilty?" Annie asked.

There was the same low intensity in her voice as she breathlessly awaited the answer.

It was a moment before Mrs. Venn could command her tremulous voice to speak, and then the words seemed to almost choke her as she uttered them.

She took Annie's little cold hands in one of hers and laid the other trembling one on the girl's fair bowed head.

"If—they—believe you guilty—they will send you—to—prison!" she said.

CHAPTER XLI.

ANNE'S face look so bewildered Mrs. Venn quite wondered if the girl comprehended the import of the terrible words.

"Do you understand?" she asked, gently. Annie raised her young face, whiter now than the coldest snowdrop. Her lips moved, but from them came no sound.

"They would send you to prison, my poor child," she repeated. "But oh, child, if that happened it would kill me, I love you so!"

"To prison!"

The words rang out in a great wild cry. The girl seemed to have but just caught at the

idea, and its terrible import seemed to take the breath of life from her.

"Would they send me to a prison cell—close the doors on me, so that I might never again see the sweet, bright world, the green trees, the flowers, and the dear, laughing faces of happy children, or of men or women? I should go mad! I could not breathe in a little narrow cell. I should fling myself against the grated door like a terrified bird does against its iron cage and beat my poor hands like it does its poor wings until I fell down dead. I could not breathe in a little narrow cell—it would stifle me!"

"It may come to that, Annie. Ah! pray as you have never prayed in your life before to Heaven to save you, child!"

"It would be useless. Heaven and the angels never notice the prayers of a friendless girl like me," she answered, dreadingly. "I have never received anything I prayed for yet—Heaven has forgotten me."

"Oh, Annie, never say anything like that again, child, lest you should incur the anger of Heaven. You are in such bitter woe you do not think of the grave things you say. Heaven can always help you."

"I—I would be sent to prison!" repeated Annie, in an awful whisper, paying little heed to the words of fear and warning poured into her dulled ears. "Ah! I have such a dread of a prison cell!" she went on piteously.

"When we were down in the country do you remember me telling you of a young girl I saw whom they sent to prison?"

But without waiting for a reply Annie went on faintly,—

"They said she threw a little child—her own little child—into the swift dark river; but she said that it fell in—that it slipped from her arms. She did not cry out for help, the people said, although there were many laborers near by on the banks who would have saved it. She watched it with fascinated eyes as it struggled with the waves, and then a great alligator came toward it swiftly, silently. One moment more and its earthly struggles were over."

"Do you remember, Mrs. Venn, you said that the sentence was just, and that the sin she had committed could never be atoned for in earth or in Heaven?"

"In going through the prison one day I saw the same young girl, and it makes me weep even now when I think of how she clung to me with the bitterest sobs that ever fell from a woman's lips."

"It is spring-time in the sweet, bright world outside," she said. "Yes, those are early violets you wear on your breast. I—I would give my life if I could wander down to the dell with baby once again for one short hour and gather them; and oh, what would I not give for one breath of the sweet, warm sunshine!"

"They say I killed baby; but, oh, listen to me, lady, as I kneel at your feet. I swear to you, by the memory of my lost darling, that I did not—he slipped from my arms when I was showing him the dark, cold waves rushing on so madly down below, and—I was paralyzed! I tried to cry out, but I could not move or utter any sound! Why, I would have given my own life a hundred times over to have saved baby's! My child was all I had in this great, cold, desolate world to love."

"They have put me here purely on circumstantial evidence. I will cry out when I am dying that I am innocent, but the world will not heed."

"No one knows how many innocent people the prisons hold, who are put there by circumstantial evidence only!"

"I remember the case you cite but too well, Annie, and I hope for her own sake that she is indeed innocent."

"My case is just such another," sobbed Annie. "The people think I am guilty of burning The Fire, because I was found in the Tower!"

"If you could have explained how you came there, and for what purpose you were there."

But, my poor child, your mind is all a blank from the moment you were sobbing out your jealous thoughts under the trees up to the moment your eyes opened in this room," cried Mrs. Venn, despairingly. "Ah! try and think, Annie—try hard and think how and where you passed all that intervening time."

And Annie did try, but it was all useless—her mind was a total blank.

Ethel's consternation and intense joy when she learned of this state of affairs were indescribable.

"It is the drug which did it," she muttered to herself with palpitating heart. "I did not get quite enough down to produce death, nor yet enough to cause total loss of her brain power before the vial broke. I should have given her twice as much. Well, if they fail to convict her and send her to prison, she shall have a little more of Powers' powerful drug. I am safe as far as Annie is concerned. She cannot expose me. I can go before her with impunity now, and I may as well face her first as last," she thought, rising and pacing the floor nervously.

Ethel put her intention into execution at once, hurrying to Annie's apartment while she had the courage to do so.

She found no one in the room with Annie save the old nurse, whom the officers in charge had placed at the girl's bedside.

As she advanced hesitatingly toward the couch, Annie turned her head on the pillow and saw her, and a little hushed cry together with the name "Ethel" broke from her lips.

Ethel came quickly up to the bedside, and bent over her.

"Annie," she murmured, in her sweet, smooth, false voice, "tell me you do not quite hate me for coming back here and finding me Harry's wife. Harry's mother has told you all that has happened—that we thought you false, and that you afterwards died!"

"No, I cannot blame you for loving and marrying Harry," sobbed Annie, wretchedly, "for you loved him before I ever came between you, and he loved you first, last, always!"

"I will send away your nurse while we talk," said Ethel, turning imperiously to the woman standing on the other side of the couch. "Retire to the adjoining room," she said, waving her white jewelled hand towards an inner apartment. "I will ring for you when you are wanted."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," returned the nurse, "it is not from you I am to take orders, but from the officer outside. I shall not leave her alone one moment, night or day, until she is taken from this house, which is to be very soon now, poor soul!"

Ethel turned slowly and looked at the nurse. What was there about this person that struck such a dull, cold chill to her heart? she vaguely wondered. She had heard just such a peculiar voice somewhere in her life before—but where?

Ethel looked at the woman keenly. Surely it must be only her imagination that she had met this woman before, for the grey hair, combed smoothly back and tucked into a widow's cap, together with the blue glasses she wore, was not familiar.

The entrance of Harry's mother, followed by the miller and his wife at this opportune moment, put a stop to further comment on Ethel's part.

"Your mother is looking for you, Ethel," she said, simply.

"I will come in and talk with you again, Annie," said Ethel, stooping and pressing a Judas kiss upon the girl's cheek. "I cannot tell all that I have to say to you before others."

Mrs. Venn could not endure to see the great tears that sprang to the eyes of the old miller and his wife as they approached the couch, and turning hastily, she followed Ethel from the apartment.

It was the first time the miller and his wife had seen Annie since consciousness had re-

turned to her, and they gave their tears full vent.

"Annie," said her aunt, kneeling down on the rug beside the couch and hiding her face in the counterpane, while her whole frame was convulsed with sobs, "tell me you forgive me, child! Ah, Annie! my repentance has been bitter for turning you from our door on that awful stormy night! I did not think you would really go. I—I left the door unlatched all that night, thinking you would creep in; but you never came back again, and now this is the outcome of all of it."

"Don't cry—don't cry for me, aunt," murmured Annie. "It was all to be. Heaven knows best. I forgave you long ago."

"Tell her the rest," sobbed the old miller; "I cannot do it."

"Yes, tell me anything there is to tell," said Annie, wearily. "Nothing can cause me much of a heartache now—I have suffered so much."

"You know about your being under—under arrest, don't you, Annie?" sobbed her aunt, in a faltering voice.

"Yes," replied the girl, trying to speak bravely.

"The day of your trial is drawing near, very near," she whispered. "It is set down for the day after to-morrow, and you are to be taken to the court-house if you are able to be moved from this bed, to answer to the charge of setting fire to The Fire."

CHAPTER XLII.

No answer fell from Annie's white lips. Her aunt thought she had swooned, her face was so marble-white, but as she sprang towards her the white lids which had dropped over the blue, horror-stricken eyes were raised slowly and by a great effort.

"I wish Heaven would let me die before to-morrow!" she moaned. "When they lead me into the crowded court-room, a prisoner, up to the bar of justice, I feel sure I shall drop down dead at the judge's feet!"

"Your uncle and I will be there to comfort and sustain you," replied the miller's wife, huskily.

"And I will be there," added a tremulous, husky voice at her elbow, and glancing up, both she and Annie saw Harry Venn standing at the bedside. "For the sake of what we once were to each other, listen to me, Annie!" he pleaded, his bonny eyes filling with tears as he noticed how she shrank from him—"listen just one moment!"

Annie covered her face with her hands. Ah! what little transparent hands they were! Harry knew by the tears that trickled through them that she was silently weeping.

How his heart ached for her! A passionate longing that he could hardly repress came over him to kneel down beside the couch and take her in his arms, and lay that dear little head against his breast if for but a moment—just one moment, and the hallowed sweetness of that memory would last him through eternity.

But he put the longing from him, remembering it was but just that he should suffer in silence, for it was his hand that had severed, in a moment of pique, the tie that should for ever have bound him to the only woman he had ever really loved.

"The trial will be the day after to-morrow, Annie," said Harry, "and I have employed the very best counsel that money will procure. Be brave and hopeful. You must not despair, no matter how dark the gathering clouds may seem at times. You are innocent, and you must trust to Heaven that it will be proven so."

Suddenly and very solemnly Annie lifted her tear-swollen face from her little hand.

"Do you believe me innocent?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes," he answered, quickly adding, in a tone thrilling with earnestness, and just the suspicion of tears in it, "I would sooner think

that an angel from Heaven set fire to The First than you, Annie!"

It would have touched a heart of stone to see the glad light that shone in her blue eyes.

Her lips trembled, and she held out one little fluttering white hand timidly to him.

"So long as you believe me innocent I can face the ordeal," she said.

And the girl never dreamed in her guilelessness how much those words implied.

They struck home to Harry's heart like an arrow shot from a bow, and revealed to him a startling truth—Annie still cared for him!

Ah! if it could be but true, he would—

He stifled a bitter groan on his lips. He dared not follow the thought to the end, for the image of Ethel rose before him—Ethel—his wife!

In the meantime the news of the approaching trial was the one topic of conversation with almost every one in the village, and the intense excitement was at fever heat.

Was she innocent or guilty?

Ah! who could tell? But this much every one was forced to reluctantly admit—the case looked pitifully dark against her.

This much the lawyer was forced to tell Harry, and the agony he read on the young man's face was a revelation to him, but he wisely held his peace.

"Let neither time, money, or pains be spared," Harry cried, pacing rapidly up and down the room. "You must save her!"

"I will do everything in my power," returned the lawyer. "But there are occasionally cases beyond the skill of the best attorneys, and this is one of them. The loss of her memory from the night she left you until she came out of that trance ties my hands completely. I have done everything to endeavour to prove an *alibi*, but it would be useless to attempt it."

"She was in the house at the time the fire occurred, and no servant admitted her. How then did she gain an entrance to The First—and, above all, why did she go there secretly? These are the points that I shall have to combat," said the lawyer, "and in the face of it all—although I shall certainly do all in human power to save her—yet I see very little hope for her."

Annie's nervousness had grown so great during the day, in pondering over what would take place on the morrow, that a sleeping-draught had to be administered to her.

And what a mercy those hours of oblivion were. All the bitter disgrace, the pain, sorrow, and humiliation that would face her on the morrow were buried in deep, untroubled sleep now. And Harry, as he came and stood a moment at her bedside, would have thanked Heaven indeed if it had been the oblivion of death for poor Annie.

Even the nurse who sat by her couch was weeping.

"You feel sorry for her, even though you never knew poor Annie," said Harry, gratefully, but in a husky voice.

"Yes, I knew her," muttered the woman. "She was so very good to me once I cannot forget her. I—I was going home to my old mother, who was very ill, and who lived a short distance away, and had just bare change enough to reach there, when Annie Wells—she was that then—came and emptied a small purse full of pennies in my hand—the savings of years."

"You must love your mother very dearly," she said, with tears in her sweet eyes. "That is right; you will never have but one mother to love. Do all you can to prolong her life. Mine died when I was a little child. Only those who have lost a dear mother can understand how pitiful it is for a young girl to go through life without the love and cheering guidance of one. Buy all the little comforts you can for your mother, and pray she may be spared long to you. I wish I had more to give you for her."

"I had never uttered a prayer for long years, but if I could have remembered one I would have fell at her feet and kissed her

ground she had stood on and repeated it for Annie Wells, bless her!"

Harry Venn bowed his head; his heart was too full of utterance.

"No wonder I was glad that the officers sent me here to nurse and tend her. Why, I would give my life to be of service to her."

No one in the little village ever forgot what a glad, bright sunshine ushered in the fatal day of poor Annie's trial.

The birds had sung in the swinging branches of the trees since dawn, and even the opening buds on the rose boughs seemed telling each other as they nodded to and fro what a glorious day it was going to be.

Ah! what a mockery it all was to Harry Venn. He had had a bitter quarrel with Ethel the night before over the interest he took in Annie's case, and in consequence he had remained all night in the library, standing through all the long hours, looking out of the window at the silent stars.

He had watched them grow pale and die out one by one, and watched the sun rise like a messenger of gladness from another world, and a bitter groan fell from his lips.

Ah, Heaven! what a mockery was the light and the song of the birds. He almost wished that day had never dawned, and that the world had set in eternal darkness.

He knew but one prayer, and that he uttered over and over again, and it was, "Heaven save Annie!"

The lawyer came early to see Harry, anxious to learn how Annie was.

"She is up and dressed," was the reply the nurse sent back them. "She's very pale and weak, but she is exhibiting such fortitude in this dark hour that her courage seems almost sublime."

Tears came thick and fast to Harry's eyes as he heard the words of this message. He gave full vent to his grief, weeping as he had never wept in his life before. How he wished he could go to Annie and say words of comfort to her.

"I should advise you to take a glass of wine to brace yourself up, Mr. Venn," said the lawyer, earnestly, "lest on this day of all others you break down completely."

"You will join me?" Harry asked, huskily, as he touched a bell-rope.

"If you like," returned the lawyer.

When the servant was hurrying back with the wine to his master in the library, he encountered young Mrs. Venn in the corridor.

"What have you there, and for whom?" Ethel asked, imperiously.

The little maid told her.

"I—I have a better brand of wine in my room which will suit my husband," said Ethel, nervously, seizing the decanter. "Wait here and I will bring it to you."

It was almost ten minutes ere Ethel returned, and Harry meanwhile had rung twice for the wine.

"Say nothing about my changing this for you!" warned Ethel. "Do you hear?"

The maid courtesied, and with a murmured, "Yes, madam," passed on to the library with the silver tray and its contents.

The lawyer took it from the girl's hand, and hastily proceeded to pour out a glass for Harry and also one for himself.

Both drank their contents at a single draught.

"What bitter wine!" exclaimed the lawyer, "and there is a peculiar taste about it. It may, perhaps, have been imagination on my part that the wine was intensely bitter and unpleasant—" but even as he spoke, the lawyer turned suddenly pale as death, and sunk down in a lifeless heap at Harry's feet.

CHAPTER XLIII.

The fatal day of the trial was the saddest one that ever dawned for poor Annie.

All the night before Mrs. Venn had been with her, administering words of hope and comfort, but they brought no balm to the girl's troubled heart.

Annie watched the sunrise with great emotion. Burying her face in her hands, she broke into pitiful sobbing.

"Am I watching the golden splendour for the last time for long years?" she moaned. "Oh! Mrs. Venn, if the verdict is against me I should cry out to Heaven to let me drop dead, for death would be welcome a thousand times over in preference to going to prison. I could not breathe the air of a prison cell—I should pine away in a very short time. Why should Heaven give some young girls so much and others so little, I wonder?" she asked, suddenly, and with a bitterness that was quite foreign to gentle Annie. "All my life, from infancy up, I have been persecuted, and have sipped always from Sorrow's cup. I never knew what it was to lay my tired head on my mother's breast, I never knew a father's protecting, watchful care. I was made to feel that I was an intruder, and that there was no room for me in Heaven's beautiful world—I was lonely as a child. My girlhood was equally as desolate. And when I met Harry, and, after many trials, wedded him, I thought I had found Heaven at last. The rest of my sad story you know but too well. I can only add that I feel sure Heaven and the angels have forgotten me."

"You should try to be calm, my poor child," sobbed Mrs. Venn. "You are working yourself up to a fever of excitement. You will be hysterical when you need all your calmness and fortitude, Annie. Harry and your lawyer will soon be here now," she continued, "for it is almost time for the trial to begin."

When the lawyer had not put in an appearance at the end of another hour, Mrs. Venn, in some trepidation, sent for him; but, much to her consternation, the gentleman could not be found, although the messenger scoured the whole length and breadth of the village for him.

Many people had seen him walking hastily up the street in the direction of the Venn villa; but from thence all trace of him ended. He seemed to have disappeared as suddenly as though the earth had opened and swallowed him, and to make the startling mystery still more profound, Harry Venn was also missing, nor were they to be found when the fatal hour arrived.

Was it a plot—a conspiracy? Had they been foully dealt with, or was it a deliberate plan to desert poor Annie in her hour of need? was the terrible whisper that ran from lip to lip through the crowd, as Annie, pale and trembling with nervous excitement, was ushered into the court-room, leaning heavily for support on the arm of one of the court officers.

There was a great hush in the vast room, which was crowded to its fullest capacity. Everyone caught their breath, and bent eagerly forward to catch a glimpse of her face as she sunk into her seat.

What a fair, sad girlish face it was in its frame of pale-gold hair! The blue, dilated, frightened eyes were very like those of a terrified child.

A murmur of great relief rang through the room as the door suddenly opened and Harry Venn and Annie's lawyer entered together, and everyone noticed that they were both as pale as death.

It soon became evident that there was something the matter with the lawyer, for he looked like a man dazed, almost stupefied with wine.

The judge, impressed as everyone else by the sad, girlish face, said to himself that this girl was surely innocent of the grave charge of setting fire to The First. Yet, how could he maintain that against such an overwhelming mass of evidence as the attorney for the prosecution presented against her?

Annie herself listened in wonder at the terrible creature the opposing lawyer painted her to be. It almost seemed to her that she was listening to the sad history of some other unfortunate girl which this man was relating.

There was a great hush in the vast room when he told how the beautiful young prisoner had deserted her young husband on the very day of her marriage—fleeing with an old lover—dwelling minutely on the finding of the note which had been left behind, and of her absence for a period which covered several months.

Then with an eloquence that made the people marvel, he pictured the brilliant wedding at The Firs when the deserted young husband had found consolation with a truer love—of the terrible tragedy at night, which had almost been a holocaust—of the finding of Annie, the false wife, who had mistaken the passage that led out of the house, and had thus been caught in her own trap.

And then he closed the argument with the unmistakable fact that no one connected with The Firs had admitted her, and last, but by no means least, that she (the prisoner) found it immensely convenient to cover all the stretch of time between the night of deserting her young husband up to the morning she recovered consciousness after the fire. He said it was a daring and original scheme to pretend this sudden loss of memory, and a highly successful method of evading the damaging, rigid cross-examination—ending his lengthy remarks by the query,—

“If she did not set fire to The Firs, what was she doing concealed beneath the roof? It is left for the gentlemen of the jury to determine.”

He hoped that the men in whose hands the case was left would not be led astray by the girl's rare beauty, and thereby defeat the ends of justice.

All through the long oration Harry sat watching Annie with a world of agonising suspense and pity in his eyes.

Ah! how he wished that he could have suffered every heart-throb for her—how gladly he would have done it. And sitting there, noting with horror how the case was going against her, he made rash vows to Heaven that if poor little Annie were called upon to pay the penalty of that most cruel charge—that, being the real cause of all her woe, he would kill himself—she should not suffer alone.

He had done everything that money could do to save her.

She had answered “Not Guilty,” when the momentous question had been put to her on first taking her seat, and from the bottom of his heart and soul Harry believed her innocent.

Annie's lawyer made the strongest appeal of his life to save the girl from the iron jaws of the prison which were yawning to receive her. There was not a dry eye in the vast court-room when he had finished—but from the start the great lawyer felt himself handicapped by not being able to prove just what had brought Annie to The Firs, and how she happened to be in the tower when the fire broke out.

It was an exciting moment when the case was given to the jury.

Would Annie be sent to prison for the burning of The Firs, or would they set her free in the face of the overwhelming testimony brought against her?

On one side old Mrs. Venn sat close beside Annie, holding one of her death-cold hands, and the miller and his wife sat on the other. It seemed to affect them even more than it did poor Annie when the case was given to twelve men who filed slowly out of the room.

“Do they hold my fate in their hands?” murmured Annie, piteously raising her great blue eyes drowned in tears to Mrs. Venn's pale face.

“Yes,” was the answer, in a voice husky with sobs.

“How strange it is that the fate of a human being should rest in the hands of men,” murmured Annie, “instead of the hands of Heaven. It is not just or right; and yet,” she added, after a moment's reflection, “I

suppose it makes the world better that men should punish the sins of men.”

Mrs. Venn looked at Annie with a heart too full for utterance, thinking to herself what a blessing it was that the girl's thoughts could wander into other channels in this terrible hour that meant almost life or death to her.

She had looked for Annie to be quite hysterical when this great crisis in the trial arrived. Surely it must be the angels in Heaven showing the girl mercy by diverting her thoughts.

“I might have had a quiet enough life of it if I had never strayed out of the humble path in which I had walked since childhood, and gone to visit Ethel at The Firs. There I saw grand life for the first time—boudoirs, velvet couches, dainty fruits on silver dishes, roses, perfumed waters, silks, and gleaming jewels, and oh, I wanted so much to be a lady—I, poor Annie Wells! But I would have renounced all my grand air-castles for Harry's love—even when he was as poor as myself. Oh! what sorrow my love for him has brought me. People have said that love is a blessing; to me it proved a curse.”

The miller's wife and Mrs. Venn exchanged glances of pity. Ah! how they thanked Heaven that Annie's mind had wandered away from the awful present.

They hoped to keep her mind occupied until the cruel moment of the jurors' return. She seemed like an innocent dreaming child scarcely conscious of her terrible peril.

Mrs. Venn looked over anxiously at her son. She could tell by the expression of his face the terrible strain of anxiety he was undergoing.

Whole years of sorrow could not have aged him more than that one hour had done.

Harry did not leave his seat to approach Annie during this frightful interval of intense excitement, and his mother wondered at that.

As for Harry himself, it almost seemed to him that the breath had left his body, and that if he crossed over to where Annie sat, he would drop down dead at her feet.

He watched the hands of the great tall clock on the opposite wall, counting the lapse of moments by accompanying heart-beats.

Suddenly there was a commotion at the further end of the vast room.

“The jurors are returning,” was the excited whisper that ran from lip to lip.

“Heaven be pitiful!” muttered Harry, in terrible agony, under his breath. “What will their verdict mean for Annie?”

A TERRIBLE ORDEAL.

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CHAPTER XIX.

HERR DOCTOR ZODEN was a very kind-hearted man, and when the news of the stranger's dangerous illness reached him he felt deeply grieved.

To begin with, there was something which arrested his sympathy in the fact that he had been in some measure the cause of Mr. Smith's journey to Rothausen. It was to see him and to ask of him Robert Gibson's address that the poor young man had come to the quaint university town. Then he had brought a letter of introduction from the Herr Doctor's cousins; and the Professor had a real regard for the two bright young women who, instead of settling down to the monotonous life of German housewives, had elected to travel all through their native land, and see all that was worth seeing.

The poor Doctor reproached himself with having broken his ill news too abruptly. No common tie must have united “Mr. Smith” to Val if the news of the latter's death threw him into an attack of brain fever.

The more he thought over things the more Dr. Zoden regretted his tacit promise to Robert Gibson not to give up the place of his abode.

If Mr. Smith had been allowed to go to Dornington, and hear the last sad particulars of his friend's death—if he had been able to stand by Val's grave—the blow might have come home to him more gently.

What possible relation could this grave, haggard-looking stranger be to the gay young artist, whose bright smile had charmed every one he met? “Val” was an only son, so the nearest possible tie between the two would be consanguinity.

Dr. Zoden went down to the inn, and reassured the terrified landlady. The learned Professor was looked up to and revered by the whole town, and when he told Frau Richmann that he was positive Mr. Smith had not committed murder, and that to fancy he had done something fearful was quite a natural consequence of brain fever, the poor hostess cheered up.

“I'd fain do my best for him, Doctor,” she said, in her simple German *patois*, “for there's a look on his face as though he'd seen bitter trouble; but it went against me to have a murderer in my house!”

“Tut, tut!” returned the Professor. “He's no more a murderer than I am. He's travelled half over Germany to find a missing friend and bring him home; and because I had to tell the poor fellow his friend was dead he's gone off his head with sorrow and disappointment. Why, he brought a letter of introduction from my cousins. You don't suppose they'd be on intimate terms with a murderer, do you?”

“I'm sure I'm very sorry!” said the poor woman, apologetically, and then she went off on another grievance. It would be a long illness, and an expensive one. Who was to pay the doctor and recomp her for all her trouble?

The Professor hesitated. His heart was ready to be surety for all, but his purse was narrow, and in no wise in proportion to his learning.

“Has he any luggage?” inquired the Professor. “There might be some clue to his friends.”

Frau Richmann was quite ready to deliver up the few possessions of the sufferer. She had hesitated to open the valise herself, or to examine the pockets of the tweed coat; but the Doctor, to whose care Mr. Smith had been commended, was certainly a fit person to take charge of them.

Dr. Zoden did not quite like the job. It somehow went against his simple nature to pry into another man's secrets, specially when he might be on his deathbed; but someone must satisfy the landlady that her claims would be met. So, reluctantly, he opened the portmanteau.

He found a complete change of clothes, the linen of the best, the coat and trousers evidently the work of a skilled tailor, an English Bible, inscribed with the name “Paul”; all the little toilet comforts which a traveller used to live easily could require, but not the slightest clue to Mr. Smith's home or family.

“Paul, from his mother,” read the Doctor to himself, sadly, on the fly-leaf of the Bible; “and it has been carefully read and studied; but oh! why did not the good lady put in her name and address?”

The pockets—it seemed almost dishonourable to the Doctor to search in them—were more satisfactory. A leather case was found to contain a book of cheques on the Bank of England, ten five-pound notes, and a small quantity of gold and silver, the picture of a young and very pretty girl, and another of a middle-aged man, whose features bore a striking resemblance to the patient's.

“Sixty-three pounds!” said the Doctor to himself. Then aloud, after a careful calculation. “Come, Frau Richmann, there are nearly thirteen hundred marks, so I don't think you need fear the expenses of our friend not being amply met. Poor fellow, he looks ill enough!”

But the surgeon, who came in just then, declared there was no danger. His patient had suffered a fearful shock, and would have a long and trying illness; indeed, it might be

months before his brain recovered the fearful strain it had undergone, but in time the gentleman's youth and excellent constitution must surely pull him through.

"The crisis of the illness will be in three weeks," said the little man, blandly, to the Professor. "Until then, he is just as well among strangers; but if you could find his friends by the time the crisis is past, they would then be a great help to his recovery."

Dr. Zoden wrote the whole story to his cousin, Hildegard, who would have liked to rush off to Rothhausen at once; Emilia, though quieter, was equally concerned. The two girls took counsel together as to Mr. Smith's confidences to them, but both agreed these only concerned poor Val, and could throw no light on Mr. Smith's own history; so they wrote to their cousin that they knew nothing of the poor stranger, except that he was well off, and had a father and mother in England.

The Herr Doctor put the letter down in despair.

"There must be a thousand different Smiths in England," he said to himself, dejectedly. "Even if I could go over and search for them I should never manage it. I see nothing for it but to wait until the poor fellow is himself again."

He did his best, though he was conscious how little it would avail. He wrote to three fellow countrymen settled in London, begging them if they knew of any "Smiths," with a son called Paul, to let him know, as the young man was at Rothhausen dangerously ill; and then, not knowing what further steps to take, Dr. Zoden waited for the crisis, which his medical friend had said must occur in about three weeks.

It came. Perhaps if he had been at home watched over by loving friends, opening his eyes on familiar faces, the result might have been different, though the doctor (he of physic, not the Professor) declared to the contrary.

Paul recovered; but though perfectly rational on all other points—though as his strength increased able to converse on all the topics of the day, and showing rare intelligence; as to his own past history his memory was an utter blank.

Symptoms of this strange loss showed themselves the moment he was able to speak and understand what went on around him, but Dr. Zoden persistently hoped, as he gained strength, memory would return. Dr. Haufmann, and he talked the case over again and again, and the first declared Mr. Smith's brain was still in such a delicate state it would be perilous to try and arouse his dormant faculties by telling him why he had come to Rothhausen, which was all they knew about him. In the doctor's opinion, months of anxiety had so preyed upon the poor fellow's mind that he was unable to bear any shock, and the news of his friend's death had finished the work worry had begun.

Sudden loss of memory from such causes had occurred more than once in the doctor's own experience; but then the remedy had been easy. The patient was simply taken to the house where he had been before his troubles began, and surrounded by the faces of those dearest to him, when, in a very little while, the brain threw off its lethargy, and a complete recovery took place.

In this case, the doctor urged, the best plan was to wait. In time, as Mr. Smith grew stronger, the things he had forgotten would come back to him. Meanwhile his past was a sealed book, and he seemed to have no anxiety for the future. Like a tiny child he lived only for the present.

"But he can't go on like this," argued Dr. Zoden. "Can't you see the poor fellow's a scholar? He's had a first-rate education, and been used to every comfort. What's to become of him when his money's spent if we can't find out his friends?"

"With care the money will last a long time."

"But it can't last always! One thing, Herr

Haufmann, there are the photographs. He might be aroused by those."

The little doctor almost danced, he was so angry.

"Professor, if you attempt to force back his memory I tell you you will kill him, or make him an idiot. I tell you nature and the brain will not be hurried. You must wait!"

"I'm willing, but there's one thing you seem to forget, his poor friends at home. What must they be suffering all this time?"

"The English are cold-hearted," declared the little doctor, "and given to travelling. They will only think he has gone a little farther than he intended. If any one loses a friend in England they put it in the papers, and I've written to my son at Heidelberg (who sees the Times) to let me know if any Mr. Smith is advertising for a missing son."

By the time the warm, sunshiny spring weather had come Paul Melville was perfectly restored to bodily health, and with renewed strength he awoke to the fact that his memory was a perfect blank.

He called on Dr. Zoden one evening when he felt sure the Professor would be alone, and put the case before him very simply.

"Doctor, what am I to do? I am as well as ever, but it seems to me as though you had given me a draught of Lethe while I was ill. I can remember nothing!"

"Nothing at all! Are you certain?"

Paul shut his eyes for a moment, as though to call up some half-forgotten picture.

"I know that my home is in England," he said, wistfully, "that my father and mother live there, and I left my betrothed in their care. I was to have been married, but something held me back. I know not what, only there was a dreadful barrier between me and my darling, and I felt I could not be married until it was removed. She promised to wait for me, and I set out. I know nothing more—not even her name!"

"My dear friend," said Dr. Zoden, kindly, "you must have patience. After such an illness as yours a man's memory often plays him strange tricks. Now listen to me. A month ago, a fortnight ago, you could not have told me even so much of your past. Only rest tranquil, and as health returns memory will come back too."

"But what am I to do? Frau Richmann is most kind, but I must owe her a large sum; and though Dr. Haufmann has sent in no bill I am sure I must be in his debt."

"Be easy," said the Professor. "When we thought you were dying the Frau asked me to take charge of your purse. You have ample funds to discharge every liability, and to keep yourself a few months, if you can be satisfied with our frugal life."

"You are quite sure? It is not charity?"

"I am quite certain; you came here possessed of sixty-three pounds of English money, and less than half that sum will defray all your debts."

Paul looked at him wistfully. It was almost like the pleading expression of a dumb animal who cannot speak.

"You think it will come back? Oh! Dr. Zoden, you can't tell the agony of it. To be always struggling to remember one's own name, and not to be able."

"Your name was gathered from your delirium. It is Paul—Paul Smith."

Paul shook his head.

"It does not sound in the least familiar."

"Look," said the Professor, kindly, "I am well-nigh old enough to be your father. I have taken a deep interest in your recovery. Will you let me offer you advice?"

"Willingly."

"Then let the past rest! Take my word for it, as soon as your health is re-established, memory will return. Its present blank is caused by the simple fact that your brain requires rest. Busy yourself in the present; make no attempt to recall anything that happened before you came to Rothhausen, and believe me in six months all will be well, while if you persist in goading your enfeebled

brain by efforts to recollect past things in a little time you will lose your reason!"

Paul trembled.

"Strong language, sir!"

"But true! My good friend, there is no half-way measures that will do. You must make your choice. Give up all attempts to think of your own past history, or—you are doomed!"

Paul hesitated.

"But how am I to live? Granted, I have enough to keep me for a few months. When my store is gone, what then? Besides, I must think—I have so many lonely hours!"

"I can remedy both complaints," said the Doctor, cheerfully. "My classes meet to-morrow for the first time since the Easter recess. My assistant has been promoted. I will give you his place at a salary of five hundred marks."

Twenty-five pounds a-year! It did not sound a very lucrative post; but Paul jumped at the idea.

"Are you quite sure I could fulfil the duties, Herr Doctor?"

"Am I sure you can keep order among fifty unruly scholars, and drive into them Greek roots and Latin verbs?—yes. And let me tell you it will be the best thing in the world for you! You can't go brooding over the past with fifty boys round you."

"And the hours?"

"Nine to twelve," replied the Professor. "But, then, I can fill your afternoons. The Count at the Schloss will be glad of an Englishman to walk with his sons, and talk English to them. Then I think you are musical; and there is a choral society here, which will be an interest for your evenings."

It occurred to Paul he should certainly have no leisure; but he only asked gravely—

"Tell me one thing, Professor: Will these boys—will any of the people I meet—regard me as a madman or an idiot because—because I have lost my memory?"

"You have only lost your memory on personal matters," returned the Professor. "You can talk of England and the Queen, London and its fine buildings, just as well as anyone. Your Latin and Greek are unspoiled. All people will notice is that you never mention your home or friends; and they will put that down to the proud reserve for which English people are famous. No one in Rothhausen knows of your strange affliction except myself and Dr. Haufmann, and rest assured we can hold our tongues."

Mr. Smith was introduced to Count Dagenfeldt as a "young friend of Dr. Zoden," who had undertaken to assist him in his classes during the summer term; and would, whilst in Rothhausen, be glad to talk English with the young counts.

The nobleman was very much taken with the stranger, whose terrible illness had made quite a sensation in the place.

Dr. Zoden had taken care to inform him it was brought about by over-fatigue and trouble, and that Mr. Smith's health was perfectly re-established.

So May found Paul quite firmly established in the quaint German town.

He had lost the expression of troubled anxiety he had worn on his arrival, and also the delicate, attenuated look left by the fever.

He grew strong and healthy; his cheeks filled out, and took a cheerful, sunburnt tint.

Everyone in the place liked him and sang his praises, while the two doctors believed firmly in the success of their own prescription, that memory must return in time.

CHAPTER XX.

JESSIE CAMPBELL had not carried her warning to her friend a day too soon.

Roger Baldwin had only ceased his persecution of Muriel for a time that his purpose might be the more effectively carried out.

When they parted in front of Jessie's home, into which she had taken Muriel to reason her from persecution, the money-lender abruptly

changed his plans. Not as to marrying Muriel—he was more resolved on that than ever—but as to the way of carrying out his wishes.

He had no iota of love for the beautiful girl he meant to make his wife. He was quite incapable of appreciating one so sweet and pure as Muriel Sinclair; but he wanted to marry. He believed a wife would materially assist his pretensions to enter society.

Just as his furniture, dogs and horses must be the best money could procure, so must his wife be one other man would envy him—a girl used to poverty, that she might have no extravagant ideas; a girl with no loving father or fond brother to make awkward inquiries into his past life, and yet one whose birth no one could question.

Probably he had made researches as to the late Mr. Sinclair's pedigree, for in this respect he was quite satisfied.

He had, indeed, started originally with the design of marrying Muriel unless she was absolutely repulsive in appearance.

When he saw her beauty the design became a fixed determination; and, so far from her aversion moving him from his purpose, if anything, it strengthened it.

There was about this man something so cruel, so almost brutal, that he delighted in the idea of triumphing over the child's instinctive dislike, and of making her his in spite of her wishes.

He had crushed many things and made them serve his own ends. He meant to crush Muriel.

She should wear silks and satins when once she was his wife. He would pay her bills without a murmur, for he should like Mrs. Baldwin to be the best-gowned woman in the neighbourhood, but she would never have a penny in her pocket to spend as she pleased.

She should be waited on by his servants, but never utter an order unauthorised by himself. She should go where he pleased to take her, and nowhere else. She should be forced to put up with his company and his caresses; she was so pretty he would not be sparing of them, and her aversion would only give a spice of zest to them. She should be the mother of his children—children born of better blood than his, and through her love for whom he could, if all other means failed, subdue her entirely to his will.

That was the fate he meant for Muriel. And if he seemed to relent and leave her in peace after their encounter opposite the Campbell's house, why, the relenting was only a feint that he might get her the more thoroughly into his toils.

A man who had made his fortune by playing on the weakness and trading on the necessities of his fellow-creatures, it was natural he should be a keen analyst of human character.

His first visit to Paragon street told him all he wanted to know of the Herberts—that the father from greed, and the mother from sheer weakness, would play into his hands.

His last meeting with Muriel told him one thing more, that of her own free will he should never win her, that riches, pleasures, fine things would not influence her. If she came to him at all it would be through the persuasions of her mother, and solely for the sake of that mother and the little children.

Baldwin then left Muriel alone—at once to disarm her fears, and to procure his increasing hold over Mr. Herbert from her notice.

He took care to have Mrs. Herbert to his house, and impress her feeble mind with all the good things his wife would enjoy; but to her he never mentioned Muriel's name, and to her husband he dropped the subject, and seemed to have quite changed his views.

Geoffrey Herbert was an intensely conceited man. He always believed if he could only get a work of his published in volume form he should awake suddenly and find himself famous.

Working artfully on this foible, Baldwin introduced him to a publisher, an honest,

plain-spoken man, who told the author bluntly that poems by an unknown writer were like drugs in the market, and that the only way of gaining his desire would be to publish on his own account. If he liked to submit the MS. their firm would quote the lowest terms on which they would produce it.

Now, Mr. Fleming was so honest, that when he had heard his "reader's" report he wrote to Roger Baldwin privately that the poems were not worth the paper they were written on, and that to publish them was like throwing money into the fire.

Baldwin returned answer his friend was perfectly infatuated, and would never believe his MSS. worthless until he had bought his experience. Mr. Fleming would probably sell it him as cheaply as anyone else, and so the matter had better go on.

It went on. Fleming named eighty pounds as the sum necessary, and Baldwin advanced that amount to the luckless author on his own note-of-hand for a hundred.

But though the publisher was an honest man, there were incidental expenses besides the eighty pounds. Geoffrey Herbert had to pay several visits to London, which all cost money; advertising cost a good deal, and new clothes something more, so that another advance of fifty pounds on the same exorbitant terms was quickly spent.

It was such an extremely easy way of getting money, since Baldwin made no demur and drew cheques as soon as he was asked, that poor Mr. Herbert went on and on until he had given his acknowledgments for two hundred pounds, and had really received perhaps about a hundred and sixty.

Then came a pause. Roger Baldwin began to button up his pocket, and Geoffrey Herbert found himself in the unpleasant position of having spent all his money, estranged the few people who gave him employment by neglecting their work for Mr. Baldwin's, when that gentleman curtly told him he did not need a private secretary any longer, and should expect the bills or rather notes-of-hand met as soon as they became due, that is, some time in the end of May.

The author's was not a praiseworthy character, and perhaps he deserved his fate; but though a weak and unprincipled man in this case he had been thoroughly taken in. He had believed himself secure in his salary as Mr. Baldwin's secretary; and if the duties were a sinecure in comparison for the pay, it was the great man himself who had fixed both. Then, to do the poor fellow justice, Geoffrey Herbert had never asked for loans until they had been offered in the first case; and he never dreamed that Roger Baldwin would expect to be repaid until his poems reaped a golden harvest. He had looked on the money as a delicate way of assisting him, and never imagined the acknowledgments he gave would be acted on.

And now, on the bright May day at the athletic sports, the truth broke on him. Roger Baldwin dismissed him. He was paid weekly, and so subject to a week's notice. The money for that week was flung at him, with a laughing sneer that he had better take care of it, as it was the last to be had from that quarter. Then Mr. Baldwin went on to remind him that the first loan was due on the twentieth of May, and the other smaller ones at regular intervals till the end of June.

"So that, my good friend, between this and the first of July you will have the goodness to produce two hundred pounds due to me for value received, and I hope you will be punctual, for the consequences otherwise will be most unpleasant."

"But if I haven't got the money you can't have it," said Herbert blankly; "and it is hardly likely my poems will realise so much so soon!"

"The first edition of your poems will appear on the 30th of September," said Baldwin, laconically. "It seems that good fellow Fleming felt it would be fairer to you to wait

till the beginning of the winter season, so you mustn't expect help from that source."

"Perhaps Fleming would lend me the money on the security of the poems?" said their author hopelessly.

"You can try him if you like, but if he had thought so highly of them he would probably have published them at his own risk in the first case."

"I wish to Heaven he had," Baldwin, said the poor fellow, despairingly, "you can't mean that you expect me to find a hundred pounds by the twentieth. Why, it gives me barely a fortnight!"

"Borrow of your other friends. I am sure it's time you gave them a turn of obliging you. I have done it long enough."

Like most weak characters Herbert was a bad temper. He did not yet realise the cat's-paw he had been made of, and how hopelessly he was entangled, poor, helpless fly in the spider's cruel web.

"Well," he said, sullenly, "you'll have to do your worst. You can't get blood out of a stone. I haven't got a hundred shillings, much less a hundred pounds, so you'll have to go without!"

"In that case the law must take its course."

"What course?"

"I rather fancy," said the usurer, calmly, "that the furniture of a certain house in Paragon-street is pledged to me as a kind of security for my money. I believe I hold a paper, duly witnessed and stamped, which assigns it to me if you fail to keep your agreements."

"Why, that was a mere friendly letter!"

"But it bears the Government stamp, and will answer my purpose perfectly. You have an ailing wife, and, I believe, several small children. You won't find furnished lodgings either cheap or comfortable."

"Are you a fiend?" demanded the victim. "You know you led me on and on, step by step, and from the first you knew how poor I was. It looks as though you had deliberately set to work to ruin me."

Baldwin smiled sardonically. It was at this point that Jessie Campbell noticed them.

"You forget your part of the bargain," he said, lightly. "I think I've waited patiently long enough. You'd better go home and put the screw on, and I promise you the day the wedding comes off you shall have all your papers back and two hundred pounds into the bargain."

Jessie, of course, could not leave her pupils to follow the two men, who turned abruptly in the direction of the refreshment tent, so that she did not hear Mr. Herbert's answer. To do the man justice, he did make an effort, though a feeble one, to change the money-lender's conditions.

"I can't think why you've set your fancy on Muriel. She's not much to look at, and she has a temper of her own, while with your money you have the whole world to choose from."

"It's no use talking, Herbert. I have made my choice, and I abide by it. I shall marry Muriel Sinclair with your help or without!"

"You will never do it without."

"She is a brave girl," said Baldwin, coolly, "but even she may fail to support a helpless mother and seven children—is it seven or eight?—and she will be their only prop when you are in prison!"

"But people can't be imprisoned for debt nowadays?" said the author, hastily.

"They can for dishonoured bonds," returned the usurer, "and so I think you'll find out. Well, when you are in prison, and your children starving, I shall marry Muriel!"

Geoffrey Herbert was silenced. Glibly as he had spoken he really knew nothing of the state of the law on this point. It was one that had never occurred to him. He was a poor man, and had been poor all his life, nor did he scruple to run into debt.

Indeed, many a creditor had summonsed him, but when his wife appeared, and stated



[BALDWIN SMILED SARDONICALLY. IT WAS AT THIS POINT JESSE CAMPBELL NOTICED THEM.]

he had no fixed income, and further told the number of her children, the instalments of the debt were fixed at such a small figure that Herbert managed to meet them somehow.

Of late years, since Muriel had been old enough to earn money and manage the house-keeping, even these episodes had ceased. The family were chronically in debt, but they did pay just at the eleventh hour, so that they had escaped any legal proceedings, and the entrance of the bailiffs had been their only public disgrace since they came to Dornington, and these were paid out by Robert Gibson so promptly that the matter had not been noised abroad.

"I tell you, Baldwin," said his dupe, earnestly. "I have done my best. I have talked to Muriel till I am tired, and so has my wife."

"Lately?"

"No, not since the last time you fixed to come to our house. If you remember you changed your mind, and did not come."

"I remember."

"Since that I thought you had given up the idea, and I have let the matter drop. I don't care to argue with Muriel more than I can help."

"You will have to argue with her now."

"And you know I have no legal control over her. She's not my own child, and, if she were, my authority over her would have ceased last week when she was twenty-one."

"You must work on her feelings—tell her you'll be in jail, the house stripped of furniture, and her mother and the children starving if she does not yield."

Mr. Herbert shuddered at the picture so glibly drawn.

"I think I'll get her mother to talk to her. I had ordered the pony carriage to drive my wife this evening. I will tell her all you say, and let her work on Muriel."

He gave a sigh to the memory of the money the drive would cost, and the shillings he had

paid for his children's plants only that morning. Well, if Muriel gave in all would be well, and, if not, a few shillings made no difference.

"Remember one thing," said Mr. Baldwin, sharply, "you are not to represent me as an ogre to your wife and daughter. You have got into difficulties, and a cruel creditor (all creditors are called cruel) is pressing you, and means to ruin you unless he has two hundred pounds. I step forward to the rescue on the sole condition of Muriel's marrying me."

"I understand—she must give in," said the man, wildly. "What does the fancy of one girl count against the comfort and prosperity of a whole family? Oh yes, Baldwin it will be right enough."

"I think so," returned the other, complacently. "And remember, Herbert, there's to be no shilly-shallying. The day she gives in I'll go to London for the license, and we'll be married the next morning."

"Very well."

As he must yield on the main point it was of no use to dispute the trifling details; but though he had spoken confidently of Muriel's consent, in his secret heart he did not feel so sure of it.

"Has she many friends?" asked Baldwin, abruptly, "anyone who'd come forward and find the money that my young lady might escape my wedding ring?"

"Muriel was never one to make many friends," said her stepfather. "She turns up her nose at anything but gentry, and she won't let anyone patronise her. Mrs. Payne, the doctor's wife, is about the only well-to-do friend she has. There's a young daily governess she's hand-and-glove with, and I believe Mrs. Netherton, where she teaches, is kind to her; but the Nethertons are not rich for their position, and it is not likely they'd pay two hundred pounds to gratify a girl's whim."

"No, I think it's pretty safe. And you will

break it to your wife to-night, and tell her she must use all her influence over her daughter?"

"Haven't I told you that I will? I think I'll leave you now, Baldwin. I have a great deal to think over, and you can understand this has rather staggered me!"

He went off alone, but he did not attempt to turn in the direction of his home. He was not a wicked man, only a weak and careless one, and he shrank from the task before him instinctively.

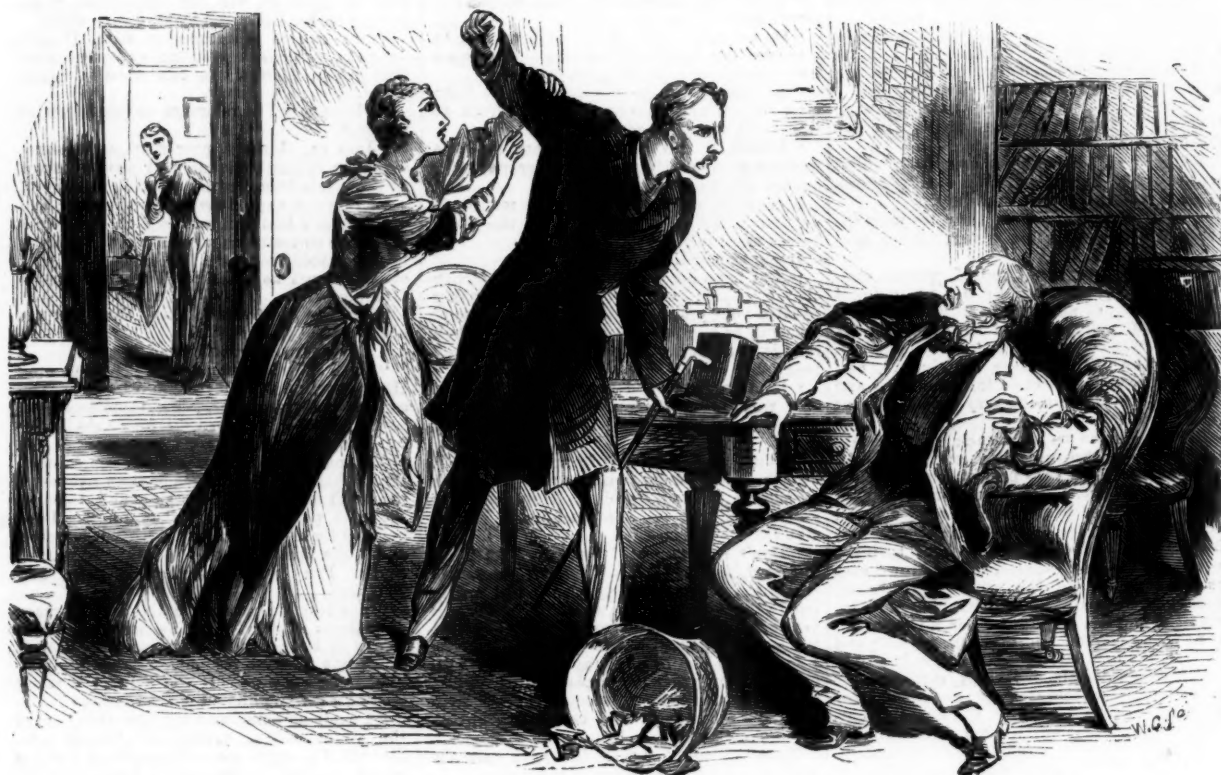
Had Muriel been the same type of woman as her mother he would not have felt the same aversion to driving her into this marriage. Fine clothes, good food, a comfortable home, tolerable kindness, and, beyond all, children's voices, if any came, would have made Mrs. Herbert's life perfectly happy. No creature comforts would have atoned to Muriel for want of love.

She would loathe all that was given to her by a man she disliked. Her proud spirit would not bow to the yoke of an inferior husband. She would chafe perpetually at her fetters, just as some poor little wild bird, if caged, beat its wings against the bars of its prison house, so would it be to Muriel.

He was selling her, if ever woman yet was sold—selling her as surely as sheep or oxen were bartered at market. He did not like Muriel; indeed, he had rather an aversion for her, caused by his jealousy of her dead father, and yet more by the consciousness her nature was nobler and better than his own; but yet he shrank from forcing her to become Roger Baldwin's wife. Perhaps the man's conduct to himself had a little opened Geoffrey's eyes as to the husband he was recommending to his step-daughter.

Perhaps, being a poet, and having some degree of refinement himself, he had a faint idea of how impossible it was that there could come from such a marriage any measure of contentment for the wife.

(To be continued.)



[MEG DARTED FROM THE ROOM, AND FLINGING WIDE THE OFFICE DOOR, CAUGHT MR. CONSIDINE BY THE ARM!]

NOVELETTE.]

DICK'S GOOD ANGEL.

—:—

CHAPTER I.

"I WON'T take it!" says Meg, knitting her level brows, and looking unutterable things. "I'll die first! Wild horses shouldn't take me there on such an errand!"

"But," I say, nervously, "Uncle Seth will be awfully angry."

"Bother Uncle Seth! I wish he were at the bottom of the sea!" Then suddenly she turns, and laying her pretty little hands on my shoulders, looks into my eyes steadily. "Would you rest in your bed, Marie Darrell, if you knew you had been the bearer of such evil news to those poor souls? Could you?" She speaks tragically, and her sweet face flushes and pales with her sympathy with "those poor souls." "It breaks my heart nearly to think of that old lady's agony when she learns the truth, the bitter, shameful truth. Uncle Seth is a—mean beast!"

The last words are uttered in a whisper, as if they are a trifle too strong even for the occasion which calls them forth. I move restlessly; I am not so brave as Meg, and it is not wise to defy Uncle Seth.

"What are you going to do?" I ask, and for answer Meg takes up the note gingerly, eyeing it with great disfavour.

"I shall lay it on his desk; let him choose another messenger. Please Heaven, I'll keep my fingers clean. Faugh! What a disgusting old miser he is! Marie, you did not answer my question? Could you do this thing?"

"No, I could not."

"Bravo! Then I stand justified," and she laughs a little. "Don't look so scared, you small poltroon! Uncle is too indifferent to us to be

angry with us; and, as for me I don't fear him in the least," and with that she trips away to replace the note he had given her to deliver at Blossom Cottage.

When she comes back she looks at me with the prettiest air of triumph.

"The deed is done! Now, my prim and prudent sister, we may take our walks abroad with light hearts. Get your hat; it is simply divine out of doors to-day!"

We pass out of the house and across the little sandy strip of ground which does duty for a garden, and so out upon the lovely road, which is looking its loveliest on this bright April morning.

"I wonder what the Considine's will do?" says Meg, after we have walked some minutes in perfect silence. "Fancy, Marie, that lovely old lady reduced to poverty—robbed of all her little possessions! I wish I dared go and tell her how sorry I am for her; but I am a wee bit afraid of her, and quite scared at the notion of approaching her big son. I saw him yesterday, and he looked like the shadow of himself."

"Poor fellow!" I say, "he has had a dreadful time of it."

And then we relapse again into silence, whilst our thoughts are busy with the Considine's, Uncle Seth's tenants. Six months ago a young gentleman appeared at Fieldside, and having visited Blossom Cottage came to see Uncle Seth.

He said he was a medical student, at present walking a London hospital, but his mother's health would not allow her to take up residence in the city. He wished to secure a small house for her within easy reach, and Blossom Cottage pleased him if the rent was not too high.

Well, they came to terms, uncle being only too glad to let it, as it had stood empty so long, but he would only accept Mr. Considine as a weekly tenant, saying,—

"I like to be able to know that, if dis-

agreements arise between us, I can make matters comfortable for myself very quickly."

"As you please," said Mr. Considine, proudly. "My mother is hardly likely to prove troublesome, and less likely still to quarrel with an inferior!"

Many men would have been angry at that speech, but then Uncle Seth is not like most men. The Cottage was let, and in a few days the goods began to arrive, and an elderly woman was seen scrubbing and cleaning as if her life depended on it.

Then Mr. Considine brought his mother down—a stately, lovely old lady, with silver hair and the blackest of black eyes, the proudest of faces. The son did not stay long, his studies calling him away, and the mother lived a very retired life, although we always saw her at church on Sunday mornings.

If she knew us she never gave any sign of recognition, for we were only her landlord's nieces, and quite of the people. Then too, Uncle Seth has a very bad name in Fieldside and the small adjacent town. He is a hard, unscrupulous landlord, exacting his pound of flesh without mercy, scraping and hoarding his gold for the mere pleasure of counting it over; a man whose dominant passion is love of money for its own sake, and not for the good it can do, or the comfort it may bring.

Until two months ago Mrs. Considine regularly paid her rent. Then one morning when Uncle Seth went to collect it, the old servant said,—

"Mistress was very sorry, but she had no change in the house. Would he wait until next week?"

But the next week the money was not forthcoming, and we learned that Mrs. Considine's little fortune was lost by the failing of a bank, and, further, that her son had come home to be nursed, he being very ill.

His illness developed into typhoid fever, and Uncle Seth was furious.

"Not only am I cheated of my due," he

said, "but I shall have to have the whole place disinfected before I can let it again."

And now, this morning, he gave Meg a note to leave at The Cottage, requesting an immediate settlement of his claim, and threatening to levy a distress unless it were made.

Poor Mrs. Considine! How much I wish we could go to her and comfort her in her calamity.

But it is easy to see she is a lady, whilst we are only "Seth Darrell's nieces." Thank Heaven, we are not his pensioners.

Left orphans at an early age, we were entrusted to his care, being without other relatives in the world.

An annuity of one hundred pounds each was settled upon us, but we did not enjoy it until we were of age, our guardian appropriating eighty pounds out of each hundred for our maintenance and education (both of which are of the most meagre description), and allowing us twenty pounds for necessities and luxuries, the latter being very rare things at Provident House.

But so long as we have each other we are not unhappy, because there exists between us that deep love, that perfect sympathy, so often seen between twins—although, indeed, no one would suspect us to be even sisters; that is, judging by our personal appearance. Meg is like and of medium height, with the prettiest face, and darkest, softest brown eyes imaginable. I am fair, with yellow-brown hair, grey eyes, and no regular feature; very small of stature, and altogether an insignificant young person. So much for myself; and let me, if I can, be less discursive in future.

All unconsciously our steps stray in the direction of Blossom Cottage; and Meg giving a quick, nervous glance at the faintly curtained windows, hurries me by, as though guilty of some great crime against its inmates.

She blushes furiously as, turning the bend of the road, we come face to face with Mr. Considine. He is looking very weak and ill, and leans on a stout stick for support; but I cannot help thinking how handsome and goodly he still is, with his highbrow, clear-cut features, his curling yellow hair, and deep-blue eyes. He recognises us at once, and lifts his hat deferentially, smiling faintly as our eyes meet his.

"If he knew what was coming he would hate us!" says Meg, through her clenched teeth. "I wish I dare warn him; but I am afraid he should misconstrue such conduct. Oh, Marie, let us go home. I feel altogether out of tune!"

I am quite agreeable, and we take a circuitous route to avoid repossessing Blossom Cottage, so that we reach home barely in time for the mid-day meal, which is Meg's pet aversion.

Uncle Seth is already seated, and looks up frowningly as we enter.

"May I ask why the note I gave you to deliver is still upon my desk?" he says, as Meg sits down opposite him.

"You may!" she answers, but vouchsafes no other word; but my cowardly heart sinks as I look from one face to another—the one so beautiful, pure, defiant; the other so crafty, mean, and sordid.

He waits for her explanation, and when she will not speak, says, slyly,—

"Well, why did you disobey me?"

She rests her arms upon the table, and leaning forward says, with slow distinctness,—

"First, because I am not your messenger; secondly, because I will have no part in such a diabolical piece of work; thirdly, because under no circumstances would I be known as Seth Darrell's agent. Are you satisfied?"

He looks at her, this slim, young thing, so brave and so quiet in her bravery, with his small eyes grown wide, his thin lips apart. (I think he is even awed by her scorn and rebellion), then he says,—

"Very well, Miss Margaret, the thing shall be done in a less pleasant fashion. Your insolence and disobedience have only made me the more determined to claim my own!"

Her face blanches, but she answers, steadily,

"You will please yourself. Only remember, mercy becomes the strong!"

"Do you think, girl, I am rich enough to give over my houses to aristocratic beggars who never intend paying a penny?"

"You have had a great many pennies from Mrs. Considine. Surely you can afford to wait until her son is recovered?"

"Indeed I can't, miss! I am not the wealthy man you choose to consider me, and I cannot afford to be generous!"

Meg says no more, but her mouth is mutinous, her eyes defiant, and the meal passes miserably.

Being ended, Uncle Seth rises.

"You have done no good by your foolish championship; in fact, you have rather harmed your proteges. The note I shall send now will be less temperate in tone, and I shall send it by a trustworthy messenger. Do you hear?"

"I am not deaf; and your voice is abominably resonant!" she retorts, coolly. "How I envy your conscience! It is so abnormally easy!"

Without a word he goes from the room.

"Oh, Meg!" I cry, "how could you speak in such a fashion to him? How dare you incur his anger? He is a cruel and relentless man!"

"Don't I know that?" she flashes; "but if you think I am afraid of him I can assure you I am not; only I do wish I had not to live in this hateful house with him year in and year out! One cannot touch pitch without being defiled; and I have a morbid dread that I shall grow like him! Oh, Marie, why cannot we go away from this place, where everyone looks askance at us because we are 'Seth Darrell's nieces.' It may be wicked, but on my honour I hate him!"

Then suddenly she sinks in a heap upon the floor, and lifts piteous, wet eyes to mine.

"I am such a blunderer, Marie! I always do and say just the wrong thing! I wanted so to help these poor people, and I have hurt them instead! It seems to me poverty, and the publicity uncle intends giving to their poverty, must be harder for them to bear than for us, who are born in a lower grade. Oh! I hope I shall never see Mrs. Considine or her son again! I should die of shame!"

"We are not answerable for Seth Darrell's iniquities!" I say.

"No, but we are of his blood. Our father was his brother, although as unlike to him as 'I to Hercules.' They never could have had the same mother! Marie, help me to think. Is there nothing we can do for Mrs. Considine?"

"Nothing. And I have an idea she would resent any assistance from us. She is a very proud old lady."

Meg sighs, and moves restlessly. Then, suddenly rising, says,—

"Well, if he does as he threatens, I will publicly protest against it. Folks shall never say I countenanced any of his ill-deeds. Do you remember how the villagers hooted him when he sold poor Granny Goodman up, and she lying ill at the time? I wished then—and I wish now—they had punished him as he deserved. It would have been a great satisfaction to me!" and without further speech she leaves me.

The five o'clock tea is ended, and my sister and I set together in the large, dreary parlour.

Uncle is in his parlour, which is exactly opposite our apartment; and along the hall comes our maid, a raw-boned Fieldside lass, who, without any ceremony, opens the office door, saying in a loud voice,—

"The man from Blossom Cottage wants to see yer!"

"Show him in," comes the answer, and we girls catch our breath, and wait in fear and trembling for the upshot of this interview.

A slow, firm step comes up the tiled floor, so horribly guiltless of carpet; and as our

door is open we see Mr. Considine pass, leaning on his stick, and looking very white.

From malice aforethought Seth Darrell leaves the office door ajar too, and every word that passes between the two men is heard by us.

"I have called in reference to your note of to-day."

"Just so. I am a poor man, and cannot allow my money to lie idle! I have received no payments from you now for two months!"

"I regret it should be so, Mr. Darrell; but my mother's loss and my own protracted illness have thrown us on your mercy! I ask you now to extend that for a few weeks, then your claim against us shall be paid to the utmost farthing!"

"Am I to understand, then, that you are absolutely beggared?"

"That is unfortunately true."

"Then how do you propose paying me? Have you influential friends to whom you can apply for assistance, Mr. Considine?"

"It is not your concern, sir, how I shall raise funds to repay you; but I may as well tell you candidly I cannot do so immediately. We are beggared, and it has become necessary for me to resign my profession, and take up the first piece of work that offers. I ask nothing for myself, but my mother is delicate, and quite incapable of sustaining any great shock. For her sake I beg your forbearance."

"You seem to have no notion, young man, of business affairs. I have no personal dislike to you or the old lady—I mean Mrs. Considine; but I want my money, and I mean to have it, and at once. If you haven't it ready by Thursday you know the alternative!"

"I can't go home and tell her that," says the young fellow, agitatedly. "Look here, Darrell. I'll work, slave, do anything but beg to pay our just debts, and all I ask is a little grace!"

"Which I am resolved not to grant. Like yourself I am a poor man, and cannot afford to give shelter to aristocratic—swindlers!"

"You sound well!" and there is the sound of a hasty step, but Meg has darted from the room.

Flinging wide the office door, and catching Mr. Considine by the arm, she says,—

"Do not touch him! Let him go free, or you will be sorry! There is no limit to his malice; do not provoke it! Oh! I am grieved, I am grieved, to think of your mother's agony and distress; and if there is anything Marie and I can do we shall be happy."

Seth Darrell sits glowering upon her, unable to speak for passion and surprise, and Mr. Considine, his worn, handsome young face flushing and paling, takes one of Meg's little hands, and draws her from the room.

"You are good, most good, Miss—Miss—"

"Meg! Don't call me by my surname. He has made it hateful," she says, passionately.

"Oh! Mr. Considine, is there nothing Marie and I can do for your mother?"

"Nothing, I am afraid," he answers, with a kindly glance at her. "We are beyond help; but not beyond the power to appreciate your sympathy and kindness. I can only hope you have not made your own lot unpleasant by your generous championship."

She throws back her little head, and the colour floods her cheeks and brow.

"I can hold my own," she says proudly. "I am not afraid even of Seth Darrell," and grieved as he is, the young man smiles at her defiance.

The next moment we are alone.

CHAPTER II.

THE distress has been levied, and everything Seth Darrell could legally seize conveyed from Blossom Cottage, Meg and I are sitting miserably together in our bedroom. She has been crying, for Meg's heart is very tender, and she is sorely ashamed of this last act of our estimable relative. Suddenly she says,—

"Marie, how much money have you got?"
 "Nearly two pounds," I answer, filled with wonderment at such a question.

"And I have thirty shillings!" she cries exultantly. "We will give it all to them, it is the only thing we can do. Make haste, Marie; we have no time to spare."

"What are you going to do?" I asked dazedly. I am not at all a brilliant young woman; Meg monopolises beauty and brains alike.

"Do! Why carry it all to Mrs. Considine—all, I say. Goodness knows it is little enough, but it is all we have and just think Marie, (this in a hushed voice) they may even be wanting bread! It is our duty—but one's duty is hard sometimes, and I really dare not face Mrs. Considine alone."

"And I am such a poor support, but I will go with you if you wish it. Oh, Meg! my heart is in my shoes."

"And my courage is oozing out of my fingertips. Don't stay to think of what we are going to do, or it will never be done. The woman who hesitates is lost."

Five minutes later we are hurrying towards Blossom Cottage, talking incessantly of this and that, simply and solely to keep up our drooping courage; but when we come in sight of the house we pause and stare blankly, first at it, and then at each other, and learn for the first time what ardent cowards we are. The windows which once excited our envy because of their tasteful arrangement, are totally devoid of curtains, the early flowers which brightened the sills are gone, and an indescribable air of desolation hangs over the whole place.

"And this is Seth Darrell's work," says Meg, under her breath. "Let us go back; I cannot face Mrs. Considine now."

But for once in my life I am the bravest.

"I shall not return until we have seen her, and you have offered your little loan or gift, whichever she pleases to call it. Don't turn coward now, Meg!"

The hot colour flushes into her sweet face, the ripe-red lips set themselves into a hard line, as she swings open the rustic gate and passes in.

With her hand upon the knocker she turns to look at me.

"Marie, whatever Mrs. Considine may say you won't take offence. She has had great provocation, and, after, all we are of his blood;" then the knocker falls, and the sound goes echoing through the dismantled house in a startling, dismal fashion.

Presently the elderly servant appears, and, recognising us, says sharply,—

"You may as well go away. Old Darrell's taken all he could. We've nought but our beds and an old box left so if you've come spying after anything you've had your journey for nought."

Meg is very pale now.

"I am not surprised you should misjudge us," she says, gently, "it is natural; but indeed, we have come on a far different errand to the one you suppose. I beg and pray you to admit us to Mrs. Considine; our business is with her."

And then from a room near us, comes a faint, high-bred voice, "Benson, show the young persons in," and very unwillingly the maid ushers us into the hall, and from thence into a small room, where sits Mrs. Considine upon the only article of furniture the place boasts—an old deal box. But nothing can detract from her dignity. In the midst of her poverty and distress she is still a lady, and tenacious of her position.

One swift, keen glance she bestows upon us, then says very slowly, and deliberately,—

"I regret my inability to offer you chairs. Your estimable uncle removed them to-day, to satisfy a claim he had against me; and this—" indicating the box by a glance—"is not large enough to accommodate three grown persons."

Her face, like her voice, is icy in its pride, but Meg's sympathy is too sincerely hers for

her to be lightly repulsed. Advancing a little she says,—

"Madam! Seth Darrell's iniquitous conduct is as much our shame as his; and grieving over your grief, we have ventured to call upon you, if only to express our sympathy—"

"I have no need of sympathy. Young woman, you presume too far."

Meg starts back, as if she had been dealt a blow, and the woman, who has taken up her position behind her mistress's chair, looks with kinder eyes upon her. But in a moment my sister recovers herself,—

"Madam, if indeed it is so, I beg your pardon. Heaven knows I would not, by look or word, insult you, that not for an instant do I forget the gulf that lies between us. My sister and I are only poor, ignorant girls, but we have hearts, and—perhaps without reason, we have some pride. You have just cause to be angry with Seth Darrell; but I beseech you, do not extend your anger to us—his helpless nieces."

The black eyes soften, the still beautiful face quivers a moment, then resumes its normal expression as Mrs. Considine asks,—

"What do you want with me?"

"Will you please send away your maid?"

"You can have nothing to say to me that Benson may not hear!"

So Meg advances timidly, purse in hand.

"We wish—my sister and I—so far as it lies in our power to remedy the great wrong, Mr. Darrell, has done you. It is little we can do, but it is all we have," and then she pauses, frightened by her own boldness and Mrs. Considine's expression.

With a gesture worthy of a tragedy queen, she rises.

"Shall a Considine become the pensioner of a Darrell? Girl, go now, before I forget what is due to myself, and say such bitter words you may not easily forget," but Meg stands her ground, and the maid says with a faint quiver, in her voice,—

"Mistress, dear mistress, the young ladies mean well; do not be so vexed with them."

"And you too!" says the poor lady. "I am indeed fallen on evil times when my own maid criticises my actions and reproves them," and sinking down upon her uncomfortable seat, she lifts a white and haggard face to us. "If I have said anything to wound you I am sorry, but you should have been wiser than to offer me money. Poor things, I suppose you did not understand what an insult it was, coming from you. I—I thank you for your well-meant, but exceedingly ill-timed, sympathy; and beg to say in the future, I am not at home to you."

Still Meg looks down on her with infinite pity and tenderness; still she stands with outstretched hand, tendering the packet of money.

"Put it up," says Mrs. Considine, sternly, "and tell your uncle that this, his evil deed, will come home to him in fourfold bitterness and shame. How can you think that I should accept alms from those who have brought me to this pass? Do you know that to-night I shall sleep in one of those wretched holes, the people here call homes? That even now my son has gone to secure such a resting-place for me—for me, a Considine! Go, before I forget my dignity—and—rally against you. Benson, show these young women out!"

Was there ever a more disgraceful dismissal, and yet I think neither Meg nor I feel a particle of resentment against this poor, unhappy lady, robbed of home and comforts, cast out upon a bitter world at such an age, and after a long life of ease, if not luxury.

Benson conducts us to the gate.

"You must not be angry with my lady," she says, in an uncertain voice. "It is very hard upon her and Mister Dick, and he only just getting over his illness. Dear, dear, I don't know what we shall do—starve, I suppose."

"Has Mrs. Considine no friends who could help her?" I ask.

"Plenty if they were only generous enough, or she would beg of 'em."

"I believe you are truly devoted to your mistress," Meg says nervously, "and I am sure it would be pain and grief to you to know she lacked necessities. Take this and spend it as you will; no one shall ever know of this gift, which, after all, is not a gift, but only reparation," and with that she thrusts the money into Benson's hand and buries me away, weeping as she goes, and at the turn of the road we run against Mr. Considine.

He starts back, for a moment seems inclined to ignore us, but the next he offers his hand to Meg.

"You are the young lady who spoke so kindly to me the other night; now more than ever I need your sympathy," and then all his face changes as he sees hers blurred and stained with tears. "Do not distress yourself," he says, with infinite gentleness. "I shall weather the storm, but it is very rough on my mother."

"We have seen her, Mr. Considine, and she is naturally angry with us; but, oh! if she would believe in our sorrow, accept our help, she would bestow greatest happiness upon us," Meg answers, tremulously. "Is there nothing we can do?"

"Absolutely nothing," in the same gentle, chivalrous tone; "but I have found your sympathy very good. Miss Darrell," turning to me, "was my mother dreadfully harsh with you?"

"No," I say, mendaciously, "but, of course, she was not pleased to see us. I am afraid she thought we were obtrusive, and judging us by Seth Darrell was annoyed at our presumption, that is all."

"May I walk with you a little way?" he asks, with a relieved sigh. "Until I met you I felt a bit of a coward; my illness and the loss of our little property has completely floored me. But I shall rally soon, and there must be work for me somewhere."

"What can you do?" I ask, practically.

"I'm a tolerably good penman and arithmetician. I am hopeful of getting a clerkship; but in the meanwhile I must find a shelter for my mother. Dan Hyde tells me he has a room to let."

"Don't take her there," cries Meg, "the noise of the children, and the untidiness of the place, would kill her. Mr. Bowyer, the butcher, has a three-roomed cottage empty; he would let you have that."

"You forget, Miss Meg," bitterly, "that our credit is gone!"

"No, no; rest assured the people here blame Seth Darrell, not you; and if you tell him I sent you he will be only too glad to let you the cottage. I was able once to do him a service, and he is very grateful; he would refuse me nothing."

"Meg saved his only child's life," I begin, but she stops me with a sharp,—

"That will do. Mr. Considine has no interest in that."

"But indeed I have. Won't you let me hear the story?"

"Certainly not," in a most decisive tone. "You must give your whole attention to the present. Have you a pencil and paper? Thank you. May I beg the use of them?" and taking his pocket-book from him she writes a few lines, and tearing out the leaf hands it to him. "Read it," she says, "and then if you approve carry it to Mr. Bowyer."

"Please oblige me by letting your cottage to Mr. Considine. He has been most unfortunate, and my uncle most unmerciful. I know you will not refuse my request.—Mrs. DARRELL."

That is all, but as the young man reads his face flushes, and he says,—

"You are my good angel; not knowing me you have trusted me, and your confidence shall not be abused. Mr. Bowyer shall not suffer for his compliance to your wishes. I will pay him to the utmost farthing."

"We are sure of that," Meg answers quietly, and I take courage to add,—

"There are many little articles of furniture we could spare, Mr. Considine, if you would be good enough to use them, and hide from your mother who had loaned them to you."

"You girls have saved me from despair," he says in a frank, boyish way. "I did not think I had two such friends on earth. I was at a very low ebb when we met, but you have given me new heart, new hope."

"That is good hearing," says Meg; "and now Mr. Considine, I think you had better leave us. You have much to do before you can rest, and it would not be wise to let Seth Darrell know you had treated his nieces courteously."

He looks reluctant to go, but is too chivalrous to press his escort upon us.

"Good-bye, Miss Darrell, good-bye, Miss Meg, and may Heaven bless you for your goodness and friendship."

Then, with a handclasp and a bow, he is gone; but when we reach home, and pause a moment at the gate, we look back to find him still watching us, and with a bright blush Meg hurries in. Later she says to me,—

"Marie, did I say or do anything he could think bold, or unmanly? (already it was he, not Mr. Considine) and I hasten to reassure her on that point. In the morning Mr. Bowyer calls. He is a fat, florid man of forty or more, with a face the very image of good nature."

"I wanted to see you, Miss Meg, about Mr. Considine and his mother. I'm awful sorry for them both, and begging your pardon, my dear, it was just like Seth Darrell to serve 'em a dirty trick. But look you here. There's the cottage, as long as they like to stop, and I ain't going to take rent for it either. I ain't one to forget favours, so you may just look on the place as your own as long as your friends like to stay in it, and I took the liberty, miss, to send in one or two bits of furniture the missus and me found in the way, and thought might be handy," and then, to my surprise and his, Meg springs up, puts one arm round his neck, and kisses him heartily upon his cheek. He looks as guilty as though he has committed some crime, but there is an air of pride about him too, as he slaps his heavy hand down upon his knee, saying,—

"Now don't 'ee, don't 'ee, Miss Meg; it ain't anything I've done! and the missus will be proud to hear, as how—as how—you kissed me. Dang it! if I'd got a daughter of my own I'd like her out on your own pattern, miss," and Meg laughs, just a little hysterically, as she says,—

"You make too much of what I did, Mr. Bowyer; and there are very few who would repay me so generously as you have done."

"Nonsense," he says bluntly. "I ain't got a tenant for the cottage. Why should not your friends have it, and keep it well aired? And that maid of theirs is a capable body. The missus is going to give her our washing and cleaning; she can't attend to it herself no longer," and then he slips away as if ashamed of himself.

It does not please Uncle Seth to know the Considines are still in Fieldside, and he denounces Mr. Bowyer as a fool for letting his cottage to "a trio of adventurers," but if our good friend knows this he makes no sign. He is sufficiently well-to-do to smile at Seth Darrell's malice, and meets him with such an innocent air that he has no suspicion as to who obtained the rental of the little place.

About this time we often see Mr. Considine, and I notice daily, how much paler and more hopeless he grows, and would question him if I dare. But one day, of his own accord, he tells us of his financial condition.

"There is nothing for me to do," he says, "but to go to London. Surely I shall find work there, I am wasting all I have here in replying to advertisements, and journeying to various towns in quest of bogus situations. I shall go away on Monday next, and shall send for my mother as soon as I have found a berth."

"You are going away?" says Meg, in a composed voice but her face is white as snow.

"Then let me wish you all success now, for perhaps we shall not meet again before your departure to town."

"Oh, I can't go in this fashion," he says, with his old boyish frankness. "I shall come up again if only to say good-bye; and how I shall hate saying good-bye neither of you can tell."

"What does Mrs. Considine say of your project?" asks Meg, demurely.

"She is averse to it, but you know 'needs must when the devil drives.' I may come up on Sunday next."

"If you choose a judicious time," laughs Meg unhesitatingly. "You ought not to come when he is at home; he might be unpleasant. But as he is mostly away from five until ten you had best call between those hours."

"I shall not forget. Good-bye Miss Darrell; good-bye, Miss Meg. You may expect me!" and with this he is gone, and so is Meg, for when I look round, not a trace of her can I see.

CHAPTER III.

"Meg, Mr. Considine has come," I say, looking into that awful back parlour of ours. (Uncle is careful to keep the front room locked, lest by chance we should damage its faded glories!)

Meg rises, flushed, and not so composed as she usually is, and she does not advance to meet our visitor, but stands tremulous and uncertain in the centre of the room.

Mr. Considine advances.

"I could not stay away," he says simply. "I have been longing for this hour all day, and am afraid even now my anxiety to see you has made me unfashionably punctual!"

"Punctuality is the soul of business," says Meg, recovering something of her usual manner. "You ought to prosper."

"I mean to," he answers, determinedly. "I shall not be a poor man all my life. There is a great deal in pluck, you know."

He is sitting beside her now, looking eagerly into her face—the face which to me is the loveliest on earth; and she, too, conscious of his gaze to meet it, droops her head a little whilst she asks,—

"And do you leave Fieldside to-morrow?"

"Yes; and my mother goes with me. She will not hear of separation, and this place has grown hateful to her!"

"Mr. Bowyer will be sadly disappointed; he was so proud of his 'lady tenant,' as he calls your mother."

"He has been very good to us. I have to thank you for that."

"You owe me nothing; and—and I suppose when you say good-bye to-night it is for all time? We shall not see you any more?"

"Why do you say that? If things go well with me I shall soon turn up again. Shall you care to see me, Miss Meg?"

Her answer is all but audible, but it sounds like "yes."

"I'm a very unlucky fellow," he goes on; "but it is a long lane that has no turning, and my chance must come; and when it does I will not let it slip. Miss Marie, what are you doing there by yourself? Draw your chair into the charmed circle."

"I shall do very well here, thank you!" I answer, as I plant my elbows upon the broad sill, and wonder to myself what will be the end of Meg's love-story, for I now no longer doubt that she loves Mr. Considine even as he does her.

They talk in hushed voices, with many pauses, that to me are significant, and I think they almost forget my presence. At last, I hear him say,—

"I must be going. I have so many small matters to attend to."

And she half-whispers,—

"Must you go, Mr. Considine?"

"Call me Dick—just for this once. Oh! Meg, if I dared tell you all; but I am such a poor wretch, beggared of position and honour!"

"Tell me all," she breathes. "I am waiting to hear."

"Oh, Meg! Meg! I love you, I love you, and it is a shame to tell you so. I have no right—I, who am a pauper!"

"Dick, if you are poor, so am I," and having heard so much, I slip from the room, leaving him to tell his tale of love, old as the hills, new as the fresh morn; and it is not until I begin to fear Uncle Seth's return that I rejoin them.

Meg is seated by Mr. Considine (Dick, as he is from to-night), and her hand is held fast in his. Her face is alight with love, her dark eyes shine like stars.

He rises as I enter, and drawing her forward says,—

"Marie, I wonder if you can guess the truth. It seems marvellous to me that Meg should care for me as she says she does; but understand, much as I love her, honour, and worship her, I will in no wise bind her to me until I have proved myself worthy of her—until I have the wherewithal to give her a home."

"And your mother?" I ask, with my usual knack of meeting troubles half way. "What will she say?"

"When she learns the truth she will love Meg for my sake first, and her own afterwards. And until such a time as I can openly claim my wife, we wish our engagement to be a profound secret. Marie, I ought not to have spoken, I know, but it was hard to go without one word, and I loving her so," and when he pauses Meg stretches out her disengaged hand to me.

"Say that you are glad, that you wish us joy! Oh! Marie, sister, I am the happiest and proudest girl in the world!" Then what can I do but kiss her, and wish her the happiness I fear may never be hers.

"Be good to her, Dick," I cry, "be good to her. You have won a heart of gold!" and he answers, humbly,—

"Do I not know it, and feel my own unworthiness the more?"

"Unworthy! my Dick, unworthy!" Meg says, a little uncertainly. "If you please, sir, you must not abuse my property. Oh, Dick! Dick! wherever you are, remember I love you all the more because you are poor and in trouble; that I shall cling to you because of your sorrow, and so soon as I am twenty-one (I am nineteen now, you know) I shall give you my little fortune to do with as you will, so long as you take me, your Meg, with it!"

"My darling! my darling! I shall work with a good heart, remembering your words. But unless I am very prosperous you must not expect to hear from me often. When my fortune takes a turn I shall become quite a voluminous correspondent."

"Write me always, keep none of your troubles to yourself. They are mine. I am part of yourself now, Dick, and have a right to know all, share all!"

Then comes an eloquent pause, and while it lasts I look discreetly from the window. Not for worlds would I break in upon this moment, which should be all their own. But at last Dick says,—

"I am going now, Marie; thank you for your kind consideration. Be good to my little girl, and help her to bear our parting. It shall not be for long, and when my luck turns we will all be happy together."

All! Ah, Heaven, if he could have seen, if he could have known! When his luck turned, where was she, our darling, our delight?

Meg says nothing as she clings about him, but I see her face is white as the dress she wears, and my heart yearns over her, aches for her, until the pain is intolerable.

"Come with me to the gate," he pleads, and without a word she goes.

For a long time I catch the flatter of her white garments, and a glimpse of a protecting arm thrown about the slender waist; then darkness falls, and all is a blank until I hear a slow, light step close to me, and a voice that sobs,—

"Marie, he is gone—is gone! Oh! comfort me in my trouble!"

I take her in my arms, my darling, who shall never be all my own again, with whom I never more shall be first. And even now, though years have gone by, and I am a happy wife and mother, I can recall all the bitterness of that hour—all its agony of jealousy and pain, which, thank Heaven!—oh, thank Heaven!—I had strength enough to hide.

I kiss the bowed dark head, with its weight of waving tresses. I murmur words of consolation and love, and presently she looks up with a smile that touches me more than tears would do.

"How foolish I have been, and how cruel to you! Marie, I shall not cry again. What is there to cry about? He loves me, and I am sure of him—my Dick! Only think, Marie! my own Dick! And he says soon his mother will love me; and I—well, I will give her all a daughter's affection—all a daughter's care, partly because she has suffered sorely, but most because she is his mother. And when we are married, Marie, you shall live with us!"

I clasp her close, and stifle her words with kisses. "When we are married!" the words still ring in my ears. My sister, my sister! And Dick—oh, most unhappy Dick! Will any time heal your sorrow—any blessing atone for your loss?

When the Considines are gone our lives resume their usual dead level, broken only by Dick's infrequent letters.

The first Meg gets is cheerful, full of a young man's hopefulness, and she takes fresh courage from it. But in a little while I know that he writes in a different tone, for after each letter I see Meg's sweet face full of trouble, and her eyes heavy with unshed tears.

"Hope on!" I say, "the tide must turn, and for Dick's sake you must be brave." The words act like a charm upon her.

"For Dick's sake!" she echoes; "but oh, Marie, if I could suffer for him! It is so hard to think that in nothing can I help him!"

"But the thought of you must help him; the memory of your love will save him from despair!"

The summer is slipping fast away, and no good news has reached us yet; no letter from Dick has found its way to Fieldside for three long weeks, and Meg begins to droop, until even Uncle Seth notices and comments on her pallor and languor.

"If you did more work and less reading," he says, roughly, "you would not look so peaky," and Meg is too dejected to make any response.

A day or two later, whilst I am passing through our gate, I am overtaken by our ancient postman.

"A letter for Miss Meg," he says. "Will you take it in, miss?"

I need no second asking, and running into the house bounce into Meg's presence.

"How much will you give me for this?" I cry, holding it up before her, and seeing all the lovely colour suddenly flood her face, and the great light leap into her eyes. "Here, take it; I will not keep you waiting a moment longer," and then I hurry away, leaving her free to read it.

Perhaps I am absent five minutes, when I hear a hoarse voice cry, "Marie! Marie!"—a voice so unlike my Meg's that my heart gives a great throb of terror, and at first I cannot move.

But the cry is repeated, fainter than before, for the voice is burdened with agony. Then I recover my senses, and hasten to join her. She is standing in the centre of the room, staring with blank eyes at the letter in her hand. Her face is marble white, so distorted and changed that I am frightened.

"Oh, Meg! Meg! what has happened? Is he ill—is he dead?" I break out, and then she slowly lifts her eyes to mine.

"Read it," she says, in a hushed way, "read it, and tell me what it means. I am so stupid,

I—I cannot understand. Perhaps your voice will make it clearer," and I obey, trembling.

"MY DARLING HEART,—

"The time has come, for me to say goodbye for ever. I never should have spoken to you of my love; I wronged you in so doing. I never intended doing so until my fortune turned; but I was carried away by my passion, your sweetness and beauty. Meg, Meg, my little sweetheart, death is easy compared with the pain of this hour, when I must give you back your freedom, renounce every claim to your love. Since we came here, things have gone from bad to worse. I thought I could find work so easily, but no one will have me. My education is of no use to me, save to unfit me for any other life than that I led. It would be cruel to hold you any longer to your promise; I shall never have a home to offer you. I am sinking lower and lower in the social scale, and, but that it is a coward's act, I would soon make my quietus."

"Darling, forget me; you are so young, and there are so many men worthier than I. I dare to hope and believe you will yet be happy. For your goodness to me and mine, for the love you gave, which made my life so bright for a little while, I thank you, I bless you. Heart's darling, you must not grieve over much; let me pass out of your life as though I had never been, because from to-day we shall not meet again. Heaven's blessing rest upon you, my beloved, make your life a happy and prosperous one; and, if, when the sting of this parting is less keen, you can do so painlessly, pray sometimes for the man whose only merit was his love for you."

"DICK."

Meg creeps to my side.

"He cannot mean it! He would never be so cruel as to leave me all alone; I who love him so. He will write again to-morrow to unsway these words. You do believe so, Marie?"

"Oh, my dear! oh, my dear! I am afraid not. He is not a man likely to change; and to save his honour (that is his mistaken idea) he has done this thing. But do not take it so much to heart. Write now and tell him you will not have your freedom, or, better still, let us telegraph."

She starts forward.

"Yes, yes, we will go at once! Come with me, Marie. I am so shaken—so shaken!"

She is trembling like a chidden child, and when I bring her hat and mantle she is quite incapable of putting them on.

"Let me go alone," I say, but this she will not allow, and, having dressed her, we go out together, down to our very primitive post-office. There we despatch a telegram (answer prepaid) running thus: "Cannot accept your decision; letter will follow this." Then we return home, to wait with what patience we possess for Dick's reply.

"It is very long coming," says Meg, as she paces restlessly to and fro. "Oh, Marie! I cannot bear this suspense longer," and even as she speaks the telegraphic message comes.

"Open it," she pants. "I—I cannot! I—I—oh Marie! how slow you are! What does he say? Tell me—quick!"

"It is not from Dick!" I say, in a muffled voice, "but from someone named Whiteman; perhaps his late landlord."

"His late landlord! Has Dick gone? Where is he?"

"I do not know," this is the message, "Considine left yesterday, his address not known here."

With a gesture of supreme despair she flings out her hands.

"Gone! lost in the world—lost to me! Oh, merciful Heaven, help me to bear this evil!" and then she sinks into a chair, lifting her piteous white face to mine. "He could not trust my love," she says, with a sobbing breath, "he was too proud to ask of me, the little I could give. And now!—now I have lost him—Marie! Marie! it will kill me," and twisting her hands together she

breaks into a passionate torrent of tears which I am powerless to stem. She slips down at my feet. "Let me lie here a little while, until I have learned to be brave, until I have thought what to do! Oh, Dick! oh my beloved! you have broken my heart!"

I let her lie there, not speaking to or touching her; and gradually her sobs subside, her convulsive shudders cease. Then she lifts her woe-begone face.

"You good and dear sister! I cannot thank you as I ought—but you will forgive me. And Marie, dear Marie! you must help me to find him. I cannot lose my love and live."

She has risen now, and so spent is she with her passion of grief that I have to support her with my arm, and in some wise, I hardly know how, succeed in getting her upstairs, where she falls heavily upon the bed. Then she says, "Leave me, Marie dear, I am best alone now. When I come down again I shall be strong enough to hide my grief from Uncle Seth," and seeing she wishes for solitude I kiss her and go down again.

But she is not well enough to leave her room for several days, and when she does come down at last, looks like the ghost of her former self.

"I hope you're not going to fancy yourself ill!" says Seth Darrell, glancing across the table, "because I am too poor a man to pay a heavy doctor's bill."

"I am quite well now," she answers, wearily. "You need have no fear."

CHAPTER IV.

THE slow months come and go. It is now November, and not a line, not a word from or of Dick has reached us, and Meg droops daily, until even Seth Darrell is alarmed. I think he would not like to lose the eighty pounds he takes as payment for her maintenance. Then some business calls him to London, and to Meg's joy he says,—

"I shall be away a week or more, p'raps two or three, and it ain't likely I shall keep up two establishments. So the girl may go home, and I'll take you two with me."

We dare not look our joy lest he shall change his mind simply for pure malice sake. But when once we are alone Meg catches me close, crying passionately,—

"Marie! Marie! rejoice with me. I shall find him, I must. My very love will be my guide and help. I shall know if he is near or far, because my heart turns to him as 'turns the needle to the pole.' And I will not damp her joy by reminding her of the vastness of the city we never yet have seen, and cannot fully comprehend. It seems to me that looking for Dick Considine in London is like searching for a needle in a haystack, and I am far from being hopeful of success."

For the next few days she busies herself with altering and renovating her dresses, laughing, singing, jesting as once she used to do, until Uncle Seth regards her with amazement; then says, sourly,—

"So your illness was all a sham? Like all other women, you were pining for a change. But if you think I'm going to take you here, there and everywhere, you are very much mistaken."

"I never misjudged you so grossly," Meg answers, sweetly, and he glares at her as if not quite sure of her meaning.

Sometimes I fancy he is a little afraid of her, because, with all her generous, gracious ways she has a high spirit, and can be very bitter when roused.

"I'm glad you understand that we are not going pleasuring," he says at last. "We can't afford it, and you'll find enough amusement looking in the shop-windows."

"Yes," Meg answers, "and it will be so pleasant without an escort," and the sweet mouth takes a somewhat bitter curve; but in a moment her mood changes, and she addresses him with a suavity which is suspicious.

"Of course you know, uncle, we can't go without money. If you would kindly advance us next quarter's allowance we should be glad. There are nice safe places for solitary females to visit, you know, such as Kensington Museum, St. Paul's, and—suppose we say the Tower. But we must have money for the journeys to and fro."

"I don't know if I can manage it. You seem to think I have an unlimited supply of money, when, in reality, I'm a poor man; but I'll try to oblige you. Oh, yes, I'll try!"

"And you're sure to succeed. We all know how clever Seth Darrell is," says Meg, with a delicious *moué* for my benefit only, and uncle rises to the bait.

His one weak point is that he never can resist flattery which concerns his business abilities, and Meg plays upon it so well this time that by night we each hold a crisp bank-note in our hands.

"Five pounds!" says Meg, meditatively, "don't go very far; but I have another upstairs. How much do you count, Marie?"

"Seven pounds fifteen," I say. "Why do you ask?"

"Because we shall find Dick and his mother, and find them in dreadful straits; and you will help me to help them, even if it is against their will!" and her sweet face quivers, her eyes fill.

"You shall have it all!" I cry, impulsively. "I won't keep back a penny!"

"You good sister! Oh, Marie, how I wish it were possible for me to do as Thomas à Becket's mother did—to go from street to street crying Dick! Dick! Dick! until I found him; but times have changed since then. Where there were miles of streets to traverse then there are furlongs now, and if I followed the poor Saracen girl's example I should be hoisted and pelted, and finally consigned to a pauper asylum as hopelessly insane. Oh, Dick! oh, my Dick! why do you break my heart with your cruel silence?"

And then she is weeping wildly upon my breast; and I, hoping nothing, yet to soothe her, whisper that we shall surely find her lover, and all will be well. My Meg! my Meg! all is well for you now.

We travel to town (third-class, of course), and Uncle Seth conducts us to the dingiest, dirtiest of lodgings, and informs us that we must learn to wait upon ourselves and him, as he cannot pay ten shillings a week for attendance. But Meg, who has recovered much of her old audacity in the past few days, flashes upon him angrily,—

"We are not menials; and you are amply repaid for your care (?) of us! I will not consent to serve you unless it is for hire. I should not be ashamed to earn my bread; but I won't work without wage."

He is never actively unkind to us, and now, when Meg meets him with a resolute front, he wavers a little, and then says,—

"Do you share your sister's extravagant notions, Marie?"

"I quite agree with her. We are your wards, not your servants."

"If that is the case, if you're too fine to wait upon yourselves, you had best go home!" he retorts, angrily.

"Very well," says Meg, lightly (and what an effort it must have cost her to speak in such a fashion).

"When shall we start?"

"When you please!"

"Then there is no necessity to unpack, Marie. After all, Fieldside is a deal better than this. I do hope, uncle, we shall satisfy you on your return with the housekeeping accounts."

He begins to look alarmed, as visions of butchers' and bakers' bills float before him.

"You must, on no account, be extravagant," he says.

"We will do our best," Meg answers, sweetly; "but we are novices at that sort of thing. You always manage it for us, and so well too!"

To this artful speech he makes no response; but taking up his hat goes out.

"Shall we carry the boxes into the hall?" I ask.

"Certainly not; wait for Mr. Darrell's return. If I did not know his character so well I should not have ventured on my plan of action. He daren't trust us alone at Fieldside; and if he did I would make him repent his folly by ultra extravagance and waste."

As usual Meg is right. When Uncle Seth returns, he says, gloomily,—

"You had best get to bed, so that we save the fire and lights. The woman below will attend upon you, as you are too ignorant or too lazy to wait upon yourselves."

"Very well," says Meg. "I haven't a doubt you'll find it more economical than sending two such ignorant, indolent girls back to Fieldside!" and we leave the room with an air of suppressed triumph. "I knew he would be frightened by my representations," she says, lightly laughing.

In the morning she says, "To-day, sister, we begin our quest; oh, may Heaven give us success, or my heart will surely break!"

She is sitting on the floor now, her hands clasped about her knees, and her sweet face lifted to mine.

"I can't sleep at night," she says, in an awed tone, "because a voice in my breast keeps crying, Help them! help them! and often I fear they are wanting even for bread. Think of that, Marie! Oh! it is cruel, it is cruel that bread should be so dear, and human life so cheap!" And then a great dread comes over me that when we meet—he and I—I may not know him because he may be so changed, so worn, so threadbare! Oh, my love! oh, my love!

I put an arm about her.

"We must hope for the best. Perhaps it is not so bad as you fear; he is only waiting to send you good news."

"No, no, no!" she cries, almost fiercely. "He is in utter want and misery; all my heart tells me that. I am as sure of it as though he were here, and giving me the bitter truth at last!"

"Try not to brood upon this; try not to fret overmuch."

"I do not shed a tear; I am beyond that, Marie. Poor Marie! how patiently you bear with me, and how and I make your life! There," springing up, "I won't talk any more, but act. Put on your hat and jacket, and let us go out."

"But where shall we go? We shall be utterly lost in this Babel."

"Nonsense! Not while we have English tongues to ask our way back. I wonder, Marie, is it far to the Strand?"

"The landlady can tell us. Let us call her up," and when Mrs. Shippey appears she says,—

"Yes, it's a longish way, but the journey ain't expensive; a gentleman oppo—she (that is how she pronounces it) goes up every day by the 'bus, and it costs him fourpence-halfpenny."

"Thank you," says Meg, briskly, "we will follow his example," and in an incredibly short time we are seated in the "bus," and going towards the Strand, both of us considerably bewildered by the noise and tumult around us.

We spend all this day in wandering aimlessly about, Meg caring nothing for the wonderful sights, only looking so anxiously from face to face of the passers-by that my heart aches for her. But no sign of her lover meets her eyes.

I do not think she is conscious of the insolent, admiring glances bestowed upon her by men who are only too willing to take advantage of our unprotected condition, or of the more objectionable words of greeting. Her one thought is to find Dick.

But I am covered with shame and mortification, and am glad when the waning lights compel us to return to our dreary lodgings,

tired out and disheartened, with "not a word to throw at a dog."

Surely the age of chivalry is over, when maidens may not appear in public places without an efficient escort; and surely men should take shame to themselves that it is so!

Oh! I wish our quest was already ended, for I am degraded in my own esteem by the insolence I have endured to-day. If only I were a man for a moment, more than one of our persecutors should suffer for his ill-timed audacity.

The next day comes to be spent in the same fashion as its predecessor—in horrible discomfort to me, in one absorbing idea for Meg; and the next, and still the next, until my brain and heart alike are weary, although I will not confess so much to my dear girl.

The term of our stay is almost ended, and still we have learned nothing, and into Meg's lovely eyes there has come a piteous waiting look it almost breaks my heart to see.

"Two days more," she says, as we dress to go out, "only two, and nothing learned yet. Marie, I was sure of finding him, and now—now my hope is gone, I am ready to throw down my arms and confess myself beaten!"

"Not yet," I say, as cheerfully as I can. "One can do so much in forty-eight hours, and if you begin to despair the battle is lost at once."

She kisses me gently.

"You are very good to me. But for you I should have died long since of my pain, and for your dear sake I will try to be brave a little longer, but it is very hard."

Out into those dreadful streets again, wandering hither and thither as wayward fancy leads us, until I am so utterly weary I could cry; and then, in a crowded thoroughfare, I see a man on the opposite pavement, and my heart leaps to my lips. It is Dick—but, oh! what a changed Dick—haggard, hollow-eyed, poorly clad, more poorly nourished, walking with bowed head and listless step. And whilst I hold my breath in an agony of pity and pain, speechless and incapable of movement, Meg sees him too. What a cry breaks from her white lips—"Dick!" I think he hears it even above the roar of passing vehicles and blatant voices for suddenly he stops, looks round like a hunted thing, as if seeking some way of escape, and then before he can recover himself, she is rushing towards him. A policeman put out his hand to stay her, but she snatches her arm from the kindly hold, and heedless of warning cries, darts in an, out amongst the horses, until she stands beside him, and looks her hands about his arms. I see him look down at her, dazed and ashamed, stricken with astonishment; and thus they stand until, the stream of carriages having passed, I can join them.

"Dick!" she says. "Oh, Dick! why did you send that cruel letter? Why did you try so hard to hide yourself from me, who love you so?"

"It was hard," he says, passing his hand confusedly over his brow, "but I would do it again if it were to be done. I wish you had not found me!" and it is noticeable that both forget my presence now.

"Then you wished me dead, for to lose you wholly would kill me," she answers, not reproachfully or angrily, only with deepest pity for his pain. "Do you think, Dick, I love you the less for your poverty and friendlessness? Oh, no, no, no! You are a thousand times dearer to me now than ever before. Take me to some place where I can speak to you quietly."

Still with that same dazed air he leads the way to a dismal church, the doors of which are open. There are candles and flowers on the altar, but it is quite empty, save for ourselves, and, seating herself, Meg draws Dick down beside her.

"Oh, Dick, are you not glad to see me again? Kiss me, kiss me, my darling, my poor darling. And now tell me what you are doing?"

"Eating the bread of idleness," he says, with moody bitterness. "No one wants my

services. I am a dog in the market. I've tramped all over London in search of work; I've waited upon editors with an article none of them wanted, or would so much as look at. I've offered my services to tradesmen as clerk at a merely nominal figure. This morning I have been to the docks, only to learn that men such as I are not wanted. There is nothing before me but beggary or starvation!"

Meg never shrinks from him, never looses her clinging arms from about his neck.

"My dear! my dear!" she breathes, and the stony calm of his face breaks a little, under the fair moustache, the firm lips quiver. "You should have told me this before; you should have let me help you! Where is your home? Take me to it—let me give your mother that comfort only a woman can give!"

"My home! You hardly realise what you propose doing. It is in one of the poorest and lowest courts of the neighbourhood. I cannot take you there!"

"Leave me, if you will," she cries, "but I shall follow you, dog your steps I never will lose you any more. Nothing shall make me leave you unless you say you love me no longer. Can you say it, Dick—my Dick, I believed so true!"

His eyes meet hers then. Vainly he tries to utter the lie which shall free him from her tender importunities; and seeing that she is still as dear to him as ever, she breaks into a hysterical laugh.

"You can't do without me. Dick! Dick! we shall be happy yet, and you shall be prosperous. Now let us go to your mother. Perhaps she will see me now. Tell me how she bears these terrible reverses!"

"Great Heaven!" he cries, with sudden wild anguish, "she is slowly starving to death! This morning Benson gave her the last morsel of bread in the house, and I—oh, Heaven! I am going back empty-handed," and all in a moment he breaks into the terrible hoarse sobs of a despairing man. Meg turns to me.

"Leave me with him," she entreats, and blinded by my tears I find my way half-unconsciously to the altar, where, falling on my knees, I pray as I have never prayed before that help may come to my sister and the man who is dearer than all the world to her.

I cannot tell how long I kneel there, but at last a light hand is laid upon my shoulder, and a dear voice says,—

"Come, Marie, Dick consents to take us to his home. He is quiet now—but—but make haste, for though he does not say so, he is all but starving. I think he would be thankful even for a crust," and her liquid tones grow tremulous and uncertain.

I rise and follow her to the place where Dick stands, and holding out my hand, say as cheerfully as I can,—

"You must not run away again, Dick, or you will find it hard to win my forgiveness. I won't have Meg made unhappy and ill, even for your sake."

"Heaven knows I would give my life to make hers bright," he answers, huskily.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT horrible streets we traverse before we reach the noisome court where Dick and his mother have found refuge. Women at the doorways, children in the gutter, turn to look after us, passing audible and sometimes very uncomplimentary remarks upon our dress and appearance.

But Meg, leaning on Dick's arm, sees nothing but his dear face, hears nothing but the sound of his dear voice. He pauses at last before an open door.

"Be careful of the stairs," he says; "they are not too safe, and do not show any surprise at the change you see in my mother."

Without a word we follow him, and presently a door is opened, and a voice whispers,

"Mister Dick! is it you? Have you brought us any money?" And as my eyes rest on the careworn face, the ill-clad figure, I can scarcely believe this is the faithful and once

trim Benson. Seeing us she starts back. "Oh, sir, oh, Master Dick! what possessed you to bring the ladies here to see 'the poverty of the land?'" but before he can reply Meg rushes by him, takes the wan face between her hands, and by one gracious act makes Benson her sworn ally for ever. Kissing her gently upon the mouth, she says,—

"I have come to stay, if you will have me, until your mistress is better, and Mr. Dick more cheerful. I will be a help, and not a hindrance—and—and—well, you would not keep Mr. Dick's sweetheart out, would you?"

"Heaven bless you, no!" and then she ushers us into a tiny room almost innocent of furniture, but as clean as Benson's willing hands can make it.

On a straw mattress at the most distant end of the room lies Dick's mother, so changed, so wasted as to bear little or no resemblance to the lovely, proud old lady, who had so scornfully received and dismissed us—almost a skeleton, lying with closed eyes, and white hair streaming about her, one thin hand twitching the poor coverlet.

In a passion of pity and pain Meg crosses swiftly to her, kneels beside her, takes that helpless hand in hers, and having kissed it, says,—

"Dear lady, do you hear me? Do you recognise me?"

The heavy white lids lift, and a faint gleam of intelligence comes into the weary eyes.

"Yes—yes. You are that man's niece or daughter, I forget which. Why are you here?"

"Because—oh, listen to me, please—your son loves me, and would marry me if he could. Because I want you to think of me as one who will give you loving, loyal service—"

And the other breaks in,—

"Did he tell you we are starving? That everything we had has been sold to purchase bread? That only the river or the work-house remain to us? Did he tell you these things?"

"Yes; and I said that whilst Meg Darrell lives you shall never want a friend, a daughter, and he shall never feel alone any more. I have come to stay with you. Oh! for Dick's sake much more than my own, let me remain here."

And then that other worn hand goes out and steals slowly about the white young throat.

"Coals of fire! coals of fire!" murmurs Dick's mother. "Oh, my dear, how you reproach me! Of all my friends, of all I have benefitted, all who should have been loyal to me there is not one left. And you, a stranger, come with words of love and sympathy. Heaven has not quite forgotten me when I can call two such friends as you and Benson mine."

"Do not talk any more," says Meg. "You are very tired, and I may as well confess, Marie and I, are ravenously hungry. May we have dinner here, and make a little indoor picnic (if ever there was such a thing) of it?"

Dick starts up.

"No, no Meg, it must not be," and she moves swiftly to him.

"Are you too proud to accept help from the girl you mean one day to call wife? Let me have my own way now, and I will play 'Gracinda' all my life after." And do you not think that when she ends her speech with a kiss, that he is compelled to yield?

Calling Benson aside she gives her some directions in a low voice; and donning bonnet and shawl the woman goes out, whilst I busy myself laying the cloth, under Dick's superintendence, and Meg steals back to the bedside.

In a little while Benson returns laden with packages, which she unfolds with an air of proud satisfaction.

"Miss Meg, I believe I've got 'em right! Here's the ham—and real good it looks; here's the steak for Mister Dick (the coals to cook it are coming soon); then there's bread, tea, butter, and the jelly for mistress. There's the

port, and the doctor's coming in an hour or two."

Meg claps her hands.

"You are an excellent caterer, Benson," she says, skilfully thrusting the change into the faithful woman's hands. "And now we've got to build a fire; but pray, Dick, look another way, I am a novice at this sort of thing, and I don't like to be regarded too inquisitively. But, first of all, let me give you some wine, Mrs. Considine," and she proceeds to draw the cork in a dexterous fashion. Then, with an arm about the poor lady, she administers "a dose of medicine," as she is pleased to call it, and is only satisfied when she sees a faint colour steal into the faded cheeks. Then Dick must drink, "just to give him an appetite," and, lastly, it is Benson, "whose strength must be kept up;" and when the steak is cooked, the ham sandwiches duly made, we all sit down together, Meg on one side of the bed, Dick the other, whilst Benson and I take possession of the only two chairs the room boasts. The time passes with incredible swiftness, and it grows dark all too soon; then my pretty Meg turns to me.

"Marie, dear, Dick will put you into a cab, because you are going home alone. My place is here."

"No," says Dick.

"Oh, you good child!" says Mrs. Considine.

"I hope and believe that you will love me soon," Meg murmurs; "and because you are dear to me now, for Dick's sake, and will be for your own in a little while, I must remain here."

"But remember uncle," I urge lamely, and she looks mutinous at once.

"Go home, dear, and say that this is my rightful place, and here I shall stay until Dick's mother—and mine (may I call you so?) refuses to have me here longer."

Oh, Meg! oh, my darling! I can see you now as then you knelt; your arms about the woman who once had scorned you, your dear face, aglow with love, uplifted to mine. My dear! my dear! how long must I wait before we meet again!

"Meg, this is no place for you," Dick says, but it is evident he is wavering in his resolve to send her away, and she is quick to catch at this.

Rising, she curtsies coquettishly to him, looking with loving archness into his worn face.

"Are you so tired of me already, monsieur? Don't you think I make a nice little patch of colour in the room, with my ruby dress, and flushed cheeks? Isn't it a deal pleasanter to seem sitting here than to imagine me at Field-side?" and then she lifts her sparkling face to his, and there, before us all, she kisses him upon the mouth.

Then, with one hand held fast in his, one gently clasping his mother's frail fingers,—

"My duty lies here, dear Marie, but yours calls you away. Kiss me, dear, and go, for it is getting late."

So all reluctantly I leave her, Dick going with me, until we reach a respectable street, where he hails a cab.

"Good-bye," I say. "I shall be with you early to-morrow. Keep a good heart. Now Meg has found you, all will be well."

"Heaven bless her!" he says, brokenly. "She is an angel. I never can deserve her; I never can make myself worthy of her love," and with a handclasp we part.

It is a very stormy scene that follows with Uncle Seth; but to my surprise I feel no fear of him to night, and in a very little while reduce him to a state of submission, though I hear him muttering to himself,—

"A niece of mine to throw herself away on a beggarly fellow without a second coat to his back. Ah, well! as she makes her bed let her lie on it!"

But he offers no objection when, the following morning I state my intention of going to Paradise Court, as the place of poor Dick's abode is ironically called.

Meg meets me on the landing.

"I heard you coming, I knew your step," she says, "and came out here to meet you. Was Seth Darrell very angry? I know he was by the expression of your face. Never mind, we owe him nothing—neither reverence nor love—so can afford to defy him. Now you may come in and see both Dick and Mrs. Considine, then you and I are going out. Oh, Marie, how glad I am we got that money!" and then she draws me into the poor room, where I find Mrs. Considine sitting up in bed, looking a trifle better than she did yesterday.

She is too ill to show much pleasure yet at our coming or going, but her faded eyes light up a little as we enter, and she offers a frail hand to me.

Then Dick emerges from a small, close room, and salutes me in a brotherly fashion. The change in him is very marked. He holds his head erect, as he used to do. He looks less haggard and shrunken, and even his clothes have a different aspect.

"You must be a very good boy whilst we are away," says Meg, gaily. "Take all possible care of mother (this hesitatingly), and Benson will be back soon, so your duties won't be very onerous."

Then I discreetly walk out of the room whilst they make their adieux, being perfectly conscious that the sick woman is blind and deaf to all that passes, for she has sunk already into a heavy dose.

And presently Meg joins me, looking very lovely and very determined, and forbidding Dick to accompany us.

"What do you intend doing?" I ask, when we are fairly out of Paradise-court. "I confess I am quite at a loss to know."

"Of course you are, my dear little Marie. Well, it shall be my pleasure to enlighten your ignorance. We are bound for Kensington Gardens, to solicit aid from Sir Henry Considine, Dick's father's cousin. I wormed the secret of his existence out of Benson last night."

"Perhaps he will not see us," I say, faintly. "He must; I will take no denial. Why, when Henry Considine was a poor man, Dick's father helped him with his purse and his influence; and now that he has a chance of showing his gratitude let him do so. He came to town three days since on business, but his ancient enemy—the gout—attacked him, and keeps him prisoner here. Poor Benson, unknown to Dick, tried to see him and failed; but I shall not fail!" and one glance at her resolute, sweet face tells me she will not suffer defeat.

It is about noon when we reach Sir Henry's residence, and after some difficulty succeed in obtaining an entrance. A look of surprised admiration lights up his cold, grey eyes as they rest on my sister.

"You will pardon me that I cannot rise," he says, courteously, "and I must also crave forgiveness that I remember neither your name nor your face!"

"Both were unknown to you, Sir Henry, until now," says Meg, bravely, although her colour wavers and her eyes droop. "I come in behalf of your cousin, Mrs. Dennis Considine, and her son, Mr. Richard Considine."

"I know nothing of them," coldly. "We have not met for years. It was an ill-advised thing to send you here," and his white hand rests upon the bell.

"Pardon me, they know nothing of my coming. They will be angry when they know I have been here; but their necessities are so great, and my power to help them so small, that of my own will I came to you."

"May I ask if you are a relation of Mrs. Considine's, that you take such an interest in her welfare?"

"I hope one day to be her daughter!" Meg answers, very faintly.

"Ha! and you wish me to help on your marriage with her son?"

"No; I am not altogether penniless; and but that I am a minor I would give them the help you are wishful to withhold!"

"I am very sorry to hear this. With your—well—er—your personal attractions you should do better; and, really, if it were in my power, I do not recognise it is my duty to help these people."

"Sir Henry, they are starving!"

"Starving!" he echoes, startled out of his cold and cruel manner.

"Yes; think of that! Your own flesh and blood," cries Meg, intemperately, "and you will leave them to their fate."

"You can't expect me to support every distant relation who falls on evil days," he asks querulously.

"I am not so unreasonable. But in your youth, when you were poor and obscure, Mr. Dennis Considine was your friend, your patron, giving you freely of his wealth, using his influence in your behalf? Now, what will you do to repay your debt? Do for his son what he nobly did for you? You cannot, you dare not, refuse so small a thing."

"You are taking a very high hand with me, Miss Darrell," he says, flushing.

"No; I am only showing you the duty you have so plainly forgotten. Mr. Richard Considine does not ask anything of you. It is I—I only—who demand, not your money, but your assistance, confident that you will not refuse it."

How beautiful she is standing there in the dull winter day! I see the irresolution of his face deepen, the admiration in his eyes quicken into friendliness, until all in a moment he cries,—

"You shall have what you ask. Go back to my young kinsman and say that before this week is gone he shall have employment. I, Henry Considine, have promised it," and I think, with a smile, that even the Celestial Emperor could not speak more confidently, more arrogantly, than Sir Henry.

But very well satisfied with our success (or rather Meg's), we find our way back to Paradise-court, Meg enjoining strictest secrecy as to our mission.

During the three following days she is full of suppressed excitement, and I catch Dick looking suspiciously at her now and again; but he asks no questions, being almost content to wait until she chooses to confide the cause of it to him.

Poor Benson begins to regain something of her old appearance and manner, and even in Mrs. Considine there is a marked improvement. And each day I notice that she turns more to Meg, clings to her with ever-increasing affection, that her faded eyes follow the slim young figure, moving so quietly hither and thither, with a growing love in their depths.

She is not proud or cold, even with me. I think, remembering all Meg's goodness, feeling her gentle care, she has come at last to know that—

"Kind hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith than Norman blood."

On the fourth morning, when I have gone to pay my usual daily visit, I find the little party in a state of high excitement, and a letter from Sir Henry Considine is at once put into my hands. He has been true to his word, and, for a man of his stamp, he has written quite graciously:—

"DEAR KINSMAN,—Your present unhappy position having been made known to me by Miss Darrell, and my assistance asked, I have exerted myself on your behalf; and only regret you did not apply to me yourself before things came to such a pass with you. I have obtained a situation for you in the capacity of tutor-companion to Lord Lichfield, a harum-scarum young fellow of twenty; and it may lead to better things. You will will be foolish to refuse. The salary is small, £100 per annum, but travelling expenses are paid. I forgot to say you have to travel for two years, when your engagement expires. Lichfield has got in with a bad lot, and his father sends him away that he may break with them. I enclose notes to the value of fifty

pounds, which you are to remember is a loan, and repay it as you can. Part of it you will devote to your mother's maintenance until you draw your first quarter's salary; the remainder you will use to help you make a suitable appearance when you join Lichfield on Monday at College Hotel, Bristol. Please convey my regards to Mrs. Considine and your fiancée, and believe me yours truly,

"HENRY CONSIDINE."

"It is almost too good to be true," I say, returning the letter. "With all my heart I congratulate you, Dick."

"Thank you, Marie. There was a time when I was such a proud fool I would have thrown his benefits in his face, but my good angel here has taught me wisdom and humility."

"And you in return," laughs Meg, "are trying to uplift me with pride. Oh, Dick, dear Dick, how glad and thankful I am! I told you your fortune would change. See how true a prophet I am!"

"My sweetheart! But there is one very bitter drop in the cup, Meg. Do you forget for how long I must leave you and my mother?"

The mobile face shadows, the sweet lips quiver.

"I do not forget. Oh, Dick, it is hard, but harder for Mrs. Considine than for us. You are all she has, and she is growing old." Then all in a moment she turns to the invalid, takes the wasted hands in hers, and says, "I will be your daughter, I will never leave you so long as you will have me near you; to the utmost of my power I will supply Dick's place," and the other, lifting her wan face, kisses the sweet mouth.

"You are dear to me as my own," and that is Meg's reward.

How quickly the days pass now, with so much to do, getting Dick ready for his journey, and arranging for Mrs. Considine's transit to Fieldside.

Mr. Bowyer's cottage is still to let, and Dick has decided to rent it for his mother and Benson. His means are small, the cottage cheap, and, besides this, Mrs. Considine says,—

"I shall be near my dear daughter; loving her as I now do, I shall not mind returning to the scene of my calamity."

CHAPTER VI.

THE parting is very bitter: so many months must elapse before they meet again, and as Dick will be roving from place to place his letters must necessarily be few and far between. And when the last word is spoken, the last kiss given, Meg comes to me white as a ghost, but tearless.

"I shall be glad to get home again," she says, in a strange voice. "Perhaps there I shall forget this intolerable ache."

And now we are back again, leading the old life, save that we pay daily visits to Mrs. Considine, who is always glad to have us, and Meg's fingers have made the little home pretty and bright; and just because Mr. Bowyer knows Meg's love affair, he sets himself to work to make the patch of ground before the door neat and bright with flowers, and now and again sends little delicacies to "the lady that's to be Meg's own mother one day."

And although Uncle Seth is angry he says nothing, knowing how vain words on this subject would be.

The months slip by, and Meg and I attain our majority. We are free of control now, but we do not leave the shelter of Beth Darrell's inhospitable house. After all, he is our only relative—only Meg insists upon a different arrangement to the one under which we have lived so long.

We now hire rooms of him, boarding ourselves, and being waited upon by a rosy-faced girl from the village, so that we feel quite rich in comfort and cash.

On a wild October day, Benny Bowyer comes to the house. He is panting for breath, and looks frightened.

"If you please I want Miss Meg," he says; and when she appears adds, "Mrs. Benson has sent me to say her lady is very bad, that she's had a stroke, and Doctor Paget is with her now. He don't know what to think of her yet, and will you come at once, please," but before he has ended Meg is slipping on her slippers and little cloth cap.

"I will go with you," I say, though my heart fails me at the prospect before us. The rain is coming down in a deluge, and the wind is so high that it is an impossibility to hold up an umbrella.

"You will do nothing of the sort," retorts Meg. "You have such a cough, and Benny will take care of me. Now, Marie, it's nonsense to suppose I shall let you go," as I catch up a cloak. "There is no necessity for us both to get wet; and I'll be back as soon as I can. Very likely it isn't so bad a case as Doctor Paget supposes. You know he always looks on the darkest side," so kissing me, and bidding me go back to the warm room and nurse my cold, she hurries out, and I watch her lithe young form as it makes resolute headway against wind and rain, and wonder if, in all the world, there is another girl so pure, so brave, so unselfish as my sister Meg.

When it grows dark I pile up the fire, put her slippers to warm, and get out a warm, soft dress, knowing she will be wet when she returns; and about seven I hear her step on the stairs.

"How is she?" I ask, and she answers, faintly,—

"Better, much better, all danger is over now. Let me pass, Marie; no, don't touch me, I am so wet."

And as she steps forward into the light I see the water trickling from her skirts, making little pools upon the floor.

"Oh!" I cry, "you are drenched, and must have been when you reached the cottage. You must go to bed at once. I'll light a fire in your room, and make you some gruel. Meg, dear Meg, for Dick's sake you should be more careful of yourself."

"I'm tired now," she answers, "but I'll be all right in the morning. Don't worry, Marie dear." But she seems glad to slip off her heavy wet clothing and go to bed.

All that night she is very hot and restless, and in the morning she wakes unrefreshed, heavy-eyed, and aching in every limb.

"I have taken cold," she says, lightly. "You will have to go to the cottage to-day."

But I refuse to leave her.

By night she is very ill, and without consulting Beth Darrell I send for Doctor Paget. She is quite delirious when he comes.

"I'm very sorry," he says, kindly—for Meg is a favourite with all—"very sorry, Miss Marie, to say that your sister is in for a bad bout of sickness. She has inflammation of the lungs."

I cannot tell you even now of the agonising days and nights that follow, or of the awful fight Meg has for life, of the loving inquiries, the anxious messages I receive every day.

Benson helps me so far as she can, but Mrs. Considine is too ill to be left long alone, and I am anxious to do all the nursing myself.

Beth Darrell knocks daily at the sick-room door to ask in a gruff voice,—

"Is Meg better?" and looks a little worried when the answer is no.

The maid, our own honest, stupid, affectionate Sally, cries noisily downstairs, and takes off her shoes in going to and fro, lest the sound of her footsteps shall disturb "dear Miss Meg."

Slowly, very slowly, my sister creeps back to life and consciousness, and her first words are,—

"You have not written Dick?"

"My dear one, no. I waited, hoping to have good news to send him."

"That is well; he must not be made anxious or miserable about me. Give me my desk,

Marie, dear. I must send him a line, or he will be wondering at my silence."

"Wait until to-morrow, you will be stronger then."

"No time like the present, sis," smiling, and she has her way, as she always does, but in her letter she only remarks casually,—

"I would have written before but have been somewhat indisposed, having taken a violent chill, but I am pleased to say I am all right now so that there is no occasion for you to worry about me."

In a few days she is downstairs, paler and thinner than she should be, but cheerful and considerate as ever.

"I cannot expect to recover entirely all in a moment," she says, when Benson laments over the change in her. "You dear, silly goose, I am getting stronger every day!"

Stronger! oh, my sister; oh, my lovely, winsome Meg! Never any more! never any more! Heaven help us, never any more!

All through the long, long winter, she goes about in the old accustomed ways, is gentle and thoughtful for others, and so cheerful that many do not notice how easily she is tired, how bright her eyes have grown, how that short, dry cough taxes her little strength.

But Doctor Paget looks grave, and will not give me any direct answer to my questions concerning his opinion of her state.

"I'll be all right when the spring comes," she says, smiling faintly, "and we'll have such merry times together. Mother (she always calls Mrs. Considine mother now) is getting quite hale and hearty, and will be able to join us; and before the autumn Dick says he will be with us. What fun we'll have then, Marie; and we'll play at being children again, and quarrel over the spoils of nuts and blackberries as we used to do sometimes—years ago."

And the spring comes, bright and balmy, "bloom in every meadow, leaf on every bough;" but, alas! and alas! no fresh strength comes to Meg; rather she droops more and more, and with the advent of May the fear that has been on me so long, which even to myself I dare not confess, becomes a certainty.

Meg takes to her bed, and lies white (but for the pink spot on either cheek), ah! so white and quiet among her pillows.

"Dick must be told the truth now," she says, under her breath; "but break it to him gently, my Marie. It will be so very hard for him to bear. Doctor Paget has told me too plainly to admit of any mistake that I have not many days to live!"

I utter a great, agonised cry, and fall on my knees before her.

"Marie, dear sister, don't. You will make it harder for me; for, oh! it is hard to leave you and Dick, and this lovely, lovely world; and sometimes, lately, I have fretted in secret because I felt I never could be his wife. But that is over. Oh! Marie, my Marie! do not grieve so bitterly. You have so much to do for me yet, and my time is so short!" and then with a wild effort I win some semblance of composure.

"Tell me what to do," I say, gaspingly.

"Write first to Dick—stay, you must telegraph. He is in New York, and can reach me in ten days. Do not tell him the worst. Say I am ill, and desire his presence. Then send for Mr. Thurlow (he is our lawyer), 'I want to make my will! How glad I am that I am no longer a minor, and may do as I please with my own. Marie, you will not be angry that I leave my little fortune to Dick, until such a time as he has made a livelihood for himself. I know what pain and grief it was to him to relinquish his profession. It is my wish that he should resume it again; and until he has made a place for himself in the world my gift shall stand between him and poverty. You are not angry or jealous, dear Marie?'"

"No, oh, no! But Meg, Meg! my darling, you break my heart!"

With infinite love and tenderness she kisses me.

"There is one who, in time, will comfort you, dear; and when Dick is a great man, treading the road to wealth and fame, my small, poor fortune is to return to you."

Dick, my brother, there is none more prosperous, more honoured now than you; but, ah, dear Heaven! what a wealth and esteem in comparison with love! And I know that when our darling died the strong heart within you broke.

A fortnight passes, and she sinks daily. It is a lovely May evening, and her window is thrown open wide. Through it, borne by the soft west wind, comes the breath of many flowers, the sweet scent of the rich, moist earth—for in the afternoon it rained—and Meg lies drinking in the beauty of the sky and the distant blue hills.

"He will be here soon," she says, with a satisfied smile. "He will not delay," and then the door opens, and Mrs. Considine startles me by appearing before us.

"I—I could not rest," she pants. "Oh! my child! Oh! my child! It is written 'one shall be taken and the other left!' Would that Heaven in its mercy had taken me, so that you had been spared. I am an old woman—an old woman—and my life lies all behind me. Ah, Heaven! if by my death I could save yours for my son," and then, weeping sorely, she falls on her knees and kisses those dear, small hands, growing so cold now, and sobs as though her very heart would break. But as for me I cannot shed a tear.

Meg! Meg! Meg! when will the sense of my loss grow less, this awful longing for the sight of your face, the sound of your voice, the touch of your loving hand be appeased?

To-night we know that she is dying—our darling, our good angel. The sands of life are sinking, sinking! Nothing can save her now or keep her with us long.

"Do not grieve," she says once to Mrs. Considine and the weeping Benson. "I am with you yet. Heaven is very good, and will not call me away until I—have—seen—and spoken—to him."

And at midnight a cab drives to the door, and, running down, I meet Dick in the hall—oh, my poor Dick!—so white, so changed! He grasps my hand.

"Marie—she—is alive?"

"Yes, and no more."

He flings up his hands, for a moment staggers, and seems about to fall; then recovering himself, says,—

"Take me to her," and I lead the way to her room.

As he enters the weary dark head turns upon its pillow, the lovely, loving eyes are turned upon him, and that sweet, failing voice says,—

"Dick, my Dick, I knew you would come in time!" and she stretches out one poor thin hand to him.

With an awful sob he takes her to himself, holds her to his breast, her dear head pillowed there.

"Oh, my darling! oh, my darling! stay with me!" he groans.

"If I could! ah, if I but could! only it is not to be. Sweetheart, sweetheart, mother and Marie must comfort you—you will be so lonely now. And listen, dear, in life—I never could have let you go—but now—oh, my dearest!—now I can say—if there is anyone who can fill my place—who can make you happy—do not let the thought of me—come between you and your new love. Only—I would like—to feel—I was not all forgotten—that sometimes—when the toil of the day was ended—or the press of work was passed—you would visit my grave—and for a little think of all the love I gave you—and how—gladly I would—have laboured with and for you."

"You break my heart!" Dick cries, in an awful voice. "Oh, darling, how shall I bear to live through all the years without you! Oh, Heaven! this is more than I can bear!"

"No," faintly, "your strength—will be as

your day. Mother—Marie—will you leave us a moment?" and weeping bitterly, Mrs. Considine allows me to take her away.

So that farewell, so sacred, so heart-rending is made in solemn solitude; and just as the gray dawn is breaking Dick cries in an awful voice,—

"Marie! Marie! come quickly—she is dying!"

Blind and dumb with my misery I rush in. I am conscious she lies in his arms, but I cannot see her face through the mist before my eyes, only sweet and low comes the falling whisper,—

"Marie—darling sister—be good to him I—I— and then it dies out, and a man's agonised groan tells me that all is over.

My sister! my sister! can years ever make our loss less bitter? Can they bring back to your lover the old hopefulness, the old joy, or make a happy man of him again?

But though dead to us so long, so long—your influence is upon us yet; and who so loved and honoured as Dr. Considine, friend of the poor, help of the needy? Who so loyal to the old, dead love, so patient under his heavy woe?

Sister, my sister, you did not live or labour vainly; and many a rescued soul, many a wounded heart, healed by words of love and deeds of charity, knowing all the truth, would bless the name of Dick's good angel!

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

DEAD men's shoes never fit those who wait for them.

A MAN says he started thirty years ago to make £1,400,000. He has got the fourteen, but the ciphers bother him.

LADY DOCTOR (young and fair): "Please turn your head a little." Masculine Patient: "Ah, dear I you have already turned it."

SOME vile traducer says that a month before marriage and a month after death men regard their wives as angels. Of the remaining time he has nothing to say.

"SILENCE in the Court-room!" shouted a police magistrate. "The Court has already committed four prisoners without being able to hear a word of the evidence."

FOOD EVIDENCE.—Cousin Lottie (to bashful youth): "I am sure that new suit of yours must be all wool, Lonny." Alonzo: "Why?" Cousin Lottie: "Because you look so sheepish in it."

AN EYE TO BUSINESS.—FARMER: "Grouch is the stingiest man in college." LAWRENCE: "Yes, he's mean enough to take the beam out of his own eye, if he thought he could sell the timber."

DRUMMER (wearily): "There doesn't seem to be anything going on in this town." PATRICK (rebukingly): "Not in 'goin' on? Sure there's fifteen big strokes goin' on this very minute."

DR. SMITH: "Your blood is impoverished. I shall have to prescribe some iron for you." MR. JONES: "Don't, doctor. My wife says I look rustier than any other man in town already."

A POOL INDEED.—BRIGGS: "So James got five years. Well, he ought to have known better. Some men never will learn anything." BRAGGE: "What did he do?" BRIGGS: "Talked back to a policeman."

A WOMAN walked all over the city the other night in her sleep and never encountered the police. What do you suppose the cause was? The cause was that the policemen were not walking in their sleep.

MOTHER: "You won't go to heaven if you're such a naughty boy, Willie." WILLIE: "Oh, well, one can't expect to go everywhere. I went to the circus yesterday and to the theatre the day before."

BIRDIE MCGINNIS: "My great hobby is art. I do really love to paint." GILBOOZY: "I am glad to hear that. It convinces me that I am an expert physiognomist, for I knew it by the looks of your face for some time past."

DR. RISK did not satisfy the Calvinistic portion of his flock. "Why," said they, "you dinna tell us enough about renouncing our ain righteousness?" "Renouncing your ain righteousness?" shouted the doctor; "I never saw any ye had to renounce."

A MAN who was arrested in London for intoxication gave his occupation as that of a worm-eater. On being asked for an explanation, he said he was employed by a furniture manufacturer to fire shot at furniture so as to give it a worm-eaten appearance.

WIFE: "My dear, that horrid man next door has killed the dog." HUSBAND: "Well, never mind, my dear; I'll get you another one sometime." WIFE: "But it wasn't my Fido that he killed; it was your hunting dog." HUSBAND (wildly): "Where's my gun?"

HIGH-LICENSE MAN (to Prohibitionist): "But, you see, there is one class of men who must invariably have their glass before they can do their work successfully." Prohibitionist: "That's all nonsense! Who are those men?" High License Man: "They are glaziers."

"ARE you your brother's keeper?" asked a clerical looking man of an irate citizen who was loudly abusing some absent acquaintance. "Faix, an' oi consider that a very impertinent question, sir." "Why?" "Because o'im in charge av the chimpanzee at the parruk."

MRS. BROWNSTONE: "By the way, doctor, my daughter and I think of taking an ocean voyage this season; now, what would you advise as the best thing to take for seasickness?" Doctor: "Well, Mrs. Brownstone, I think the best thing for seasickness is an ocean voyage!"

JOHNNIE: "My book, pa, says that honesty is the best policy. Is that true, pa?" MUMMIBAGG: "Yes, my son; if there hadn't been honest people in the world, how do you suppose I should ever have been able to get ahead as I have? Yes, my son, honesty is a great help to a man, a great help."

"I AM very tired," said the lady at the head of the supper-table, one Sunday evening. "You should not be," said her minister, who had been asked in to the evening meal; "you haven't preached two sermons to-day." "No," said the lady, absently, "but I listened to them!"

VILLAGE Inn in the Isle of Wight. Miss Julia (who wants something to say to host): "And when does the season commence here?" "Mine host, philosophically puffing at his pipe: "When a cove comes down here with his other shirt and a comb in a bag, and five shillings in his pocket, then the season commences."

A DEAD HEAT.—She kissed him as he gave her the engagement ring. "George, darling, I have always longed for one of this pattern, and you are the first who loved me sufficiently to study my taste in the matter." "And yet," replied he, leveling things up, "it is no rarity, as in my engagements I have never used anything else."

MRS. GIBBLEGABLE: "Doctor, there is something the matter with my tongue; it pains me badly at times, and I don't know what to do for it." Physician: "Place a little cotton pillow under it between meals; it may be tired and need rest." Mrs. Gobblegable: "But I couldn't talk then." Physician: "That is why I prescribed the pillow."

MRS. JULIA SCRAGGINGTON (at our poor new curate again): "Oh, dear Mr. Precept Jones, we were all so impressed by your sermon on vanity this morning; but it is so difficult to withstand its temptations. Now, when a gentleman says I am good-looking, or truly charitable, am I very, very wrong to be—well—not angry?" Mr. Precept Jones (doing a half-hearted hedge): "The sin does not lie with you, dear Miss Scraggington."

CAPT. SPEAR: "And were you never wounded, Pat?" PAT: "Faith, sor, and I was. In the fight at Spotsylvania, a dirty rebel lifted his gun and fired. I was scared, I tell yez. He struck me right under me left breast." Capt. Spear: "But if it struck where you say, the ball must have gone through your heart and killed you." PAT: "Oh, badad, sor! me heart was in me mouth at the time."

"So you are going to move," said one department clerk to another. "Yes; I am beginning to feel very lonesome and unpopular at her house." "What has occurred?" "I am disposed to think she took offence at a remark I made about a chicken that she had for dinner." "What was the remark?" "I wondered whether it had been hatched from a hard-boiled egg."

Two Irishmen, who had been at a fair in Ireland, were returning home rather groggy. One of them stumbled and stuck fast in a bog. The other, after trying hard to get his chum out, made for the nearest house to get assistance, saying that his friend had fallen into a bog and was up to the ankles. "Sure," says the stranger, "if he's only up to the ankles let him walk out." "But, be jabers, he's in head first!"

JANE (coming up the stairs) to Missie: "I should feel extremely obliged, marm, if you would do me a little favour." Missie (who knows the value of even an inferior "general"): "Well, Jane, what is it?" "I hardly like to say, marm." "Well, of course, I cannot comply until I know." "Well, marm, my young man is at the back door, and I thought perhaps you would be so very kind as to speak with him for a few minutes while I run upstairs and make myself presentable."

MRS. VAN BIBB: "What is the matter with my husband, doctor?" Doctor Schmerz: "Well, he has symptoms of mania a potu, in addition to acute cephalalgia and nasal hyperæmia." Mrs. Van Bibb: "Oh, dear! What do you suppose caused it?" Doctor Schmerz: "I think it is due to excessive cerevisia and caudalgia absorption." Mrs. Van Bibb: "Poor, dear fellow? And mother said there was nothing the matter with him, except that he had been drinking too much. I shall never forgive her."

"Is that dog of yours good for anything?" he asked of a saloonkeeper on Michigan Avenue as he motioned to a canine that lay behind the stove. "Is he? You just lay your hand on my shoulder and utter a whoop." The man did so, and the dog sprang up and bit his owner in the leg and gracefully retired. "How do you account for that?" asked the inquirer as a general laugh went round. "Hang it, I had forgotten that he was cross eyed!" was the reply. "I ought to have put my hand on your shoulder and yelled."

"I TAKE it for granted, Miss Laura," said young Dr. Smidgley, "that you condemn, as all sensible young women do, the unwholesome and barbarous practice of tight lacing?" "On the contrary, Mr. Smidgley," returned Miss Laura, with a wistful, yearning look in her glorious dark eye, "I think a compression of the waist to a reasonable extent not only harmless but at times positively exhilarating." And that dense, stupid, wooden-headed youth sat there for an hour and argued with the young lady on the evils of tight lacing.

"WELL, there's one thing," said Mrs. Smithson, as she and her friend Mrs. Harkins entered the railway train, "that makes me disinclined to get into the last car." "Are you afraid of the other trains catching up and running into the hind car, Mrs. Smithson?" "Laws no. You see, we'd be safest in the hind car if we should catch up and run into some other train. But it's on account of the time goin' through the tunnels." "What do you mean, Mrs. Smithson?" "Way, hain't you ever noticed, Mrs. Harkins, that it takes the last car longer to get out of the tunnels than it does the front cars?" "I've always noticed it—and it stands to reason, too."

SOCIETY.

PRINCESS LOUISE is working hard on the statue of the Queen as a girl, which her Royal Highness is modelling for the people of Kensington.

It is rumoured that Princess Beatrice is about to add her name to the list of Royal authors, and give to the world a volume on lace, the result of notes made during many years.

The dressing up of empty houses for parties is being done a great deal this season; it is an admirable plan, enabling the hostess to keep her own home as a place of peace and quiet to return to.

WILLIAM I., of Germany, served in the army as a full private before he had attained his seventh year. At seventeen he was in an action.

A VERY long style of bodice seems to be coming into fashion—one reaching about a foot below the waist, and cut round, not pointed. Several of these were worn at Sandown by fashionable women.

The Government of the Czar—not the Czar himself—seems to be as eager to show itself despotic and interfering in small matters as in great, for a ukase has positively been issued in St. Petersburg forbidding women to ride upon the roofs of tram-cars.

In all probability the Emperor William II. will visit the Queen at Osborne before the arrival of his mother, but this has no political significance, as the young Kaiser and the Empress Frederick now understand each other so well that personal differences are quite things of the past.

THE "famous historic mansion called Camden Place," which sheltered the Third Napoleon in his broken fortunes, where he received those who from time to time came over to pay their fealty, and where he finally died, will be sold as an estate for building purposes!

WE have all seen the evening gloves, with the stitching done in gold wire, entangling jewels in its meshes; but the *haute nouveauté* is the seamless glove, which has a most mysterious effect. It clothes the hand like a skin, and only the most minute investigation shows that a seam is concealed in the middle of the hand, but so sewn as to be practically invisible.

A SPANISH woman's mantilla is held sacred by law and cannot be seized for debt. There are three kinds of mantillas which, *de rigueur*, form the toilet of the Spanish lady. The first is composed of white blond, used only on state occasions, birthdays, bull fights and Easter Monday. The second is black blond, trimmed with deep lace, and the third, for ordinary wear, is made of black silk trimmed with velvet.

THE Queen's health remains fairly satisfactory, but it is idle to deny that considerable care is necessary in order to stave off rheumatic and neuralgic attacks, as, naturally, Her Majesty's nerves do not get stronger; and, although she is by no means pleased at the faintest hint of anything of the kind, it would be very imprudent for the Queen to undertake any exertion, physical or mental, which can be avoided. Hence Her Majesty's declared intention of deputing to the Princess of Wales the task of receiving the general circle at all Drawing Rooms next year.

It is expected in the Royal Household that if all goes well in Athens next month the Empress Frederick will visit the Queen at Balmoral towards the end of August, having previously spent a few days in London sojourning, as the Princess Royal of England should, at Buckingham Palace. The Princess Victoria and Margaret will accompany their mother, to the great delight of the Queen, who is delighted to have her bright and clever granddaughters with her.

STATISTICS.

At the last census there were in England 12,689,902 females and 13,384,537 males.

MURDER'S library has put into circulation since its foundation nearly four million books.

In England the average of life exceeds that of France by eleven years, notwithstanding the superior French climate.

As much as 80,000,000 gallons of petroleum came into London last year in 2,000,000 barrels. With all the care taken, there were 250 fires due to explosions of petroleum.

THERE has been a very marked falling-off in the prison population of this country during the past decade. Out of 113 prisons 57 have been altogether closed. Male prisoners are fewer by 28 per cent. A noticeable decrease has taken place in the number of children under 16 years committed to gaol.

GEMS.

MAKE a point never so clear, it is great odds that a man whose habits and the bent of whose mind lie a contrary way will be unable to comprehend it—so weak a thing is reason in competition with inclination.

THERE are many people who falter and tremble as long as there is any mixture of doubt in their minds as to what they can or what they ought to do, but who, the moment that doubt ceases, have power and will to dare everything.

WE hate some persons because we do not know them; and we will not know them because we hate them. Those friendships that succeed to such aversions are usually firm, for those qualities must be sterling that could not only gain our hearts, but conquer our prejudices.

HOW often it is difficult to be wisely charitable; to do good without multiplying the sources of evil. To give alms is nothing unless you give thought also. It is written, not "blessed is he that feedeth the poor," but "blessed is he that considereth the poor." A little thought and a little kindness are often worth more than a great deal of money.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

COFFEE JELLY.—Soak half-an-ounce of gelatine in half-a-pint of cold water; dissolve it in half-a-pint of very strong coffee, sweetened to the taste. Extract of coffee can be used to flavour this jelly, and answers well.

PINEAPPLE PIE.—Mix two cups of finely chopped pineapple, two tablespoonfuls of fine cracker crumbs, a cup of sugar, a small half-cup of water, and three well-beaten eggs; cook without a top crust, and beat to a stiff froth the white of two eggs, and add to the top while the pie is hot; allow the eggs to become firm, but not browned, in the oven.

HINTS.—Never on any account add vinegar, sauces, or any kind of condiments to tinned foods while they are in the tins, and never leave such mixtures to remain an hour or two, if from forgetfulness it is done. The liquor around lobsters, salmon, and all vegetables, excepting tomatoes, is desirable to strain off and throw away. Lobsters and prawns are improved by being turned out into a sieve and rinsed with clear cold water. All tinned goods are put up as fresh as it is possible to be; but, unless corned or salted, will not keep if turned out, as freshly-cooked goods will, and certainly not longer, as many thoughtlessly suppose or expect they will. Sardines, if preserved in good oil, and if of good quality, will be an exception; so long as the oil is good, the fish can be kept in the tins.

MISCELLANEOUS.

BOTH sexes can legally marry in Austria at fourteen years of age.

PAPER railway carriage wheels are ten times as strong as those made of cast iron.

EDISON has taken out 500 patents for new inventions. He means to make the number a thousand before he dies.

AUSTRALIA has entered the field of silver production, and in the last year turned out three hundred thousand ounces a week.

AN Alaskan volcano that rose from the depths of the ocean about seven years ago is again sending forth smoke and flames.

THE latest invention of musical Germany is a mechanical conductor, a figure that beats with the greatest accuracy any desired time.

JUST a hundred years ago a man was hanged at Newgate for counterfeiting a silver shilling, and another for stealing a cambric pocket-handkerchief from a gentleman in the Strand.

JAPANESE chess is the most intricate game in the world. The board has eighty-one squares, twenty pieces are used, and the pieces change in grade when they arrive at a certain position on the board.

THE essence of cinnamon, when sprinkled in the room of typhoid fever patients, kills the bacteria within twelve hours, and keeps the disease from spreading. So say some eminent French doctors.

THE famous thoroughfare of Berlin, Unter den Linden, is the best lighted street in the world. It is illuminated by three lines of electric arc lamps, which are separated by two lines of lime trees.

THE American's love of gigantic tombstones and monuments is highly profitable to the Aberdeen granite merchants, who send three hundred thousand dollars' worth of stone every year to the United States, nearly the whole of which finds its way to the cemeteries in which wealthy Americans are buried.

THE first weeping willow in England was planted by Pope the poet. Having received a present of some figs from Turkey, and observing a twig in the basket ready to bud, he planted it in his garden, and it soon became a fine tree. It is said that from this stock all the weeping willows in England and America originated.

THE legend as to the origin of woman is different with different nations. Not more than four nations accept the legend that she was made from a man's rib. The Japanese believe that she grew on a tree, the Laplanders that she was once a rabbit, the Persians that she fell from the heavens, and the Australians that she was first a toadstool.

THE sloth is by no means a small animal, and yet it can travel only fifty paces in a day; a worm crawls over five inches in fifty seconds; a ladybird can fly twenty million times its own length in less than an hour; an elk can run a mile in seven minutes; an antelope can run a mile in a minute; the wind-mule of Tartary has a speed even greater than that; an eagle can fly fifty-four miles in an hour; while a canary falcon can even reach 750 miles in the short space of sixteen hours.

THE famous St. Bernard dogs are very carefully trained. A traveller, who visited some of the monasteries of the monks of St. Bernard, a few years ago, found the monks teaching their dogs from the earliest stages of puppyhood. Not only is physical and mental training included in the teaching, but spiritual culture is by no means neglected. At meal-time, the dogs sit in a row, each with a tin dish before him containing his repast. Grace is said by one of the monks; the dogs sit motionless with bowed head. Not one stirs until the "Amen" is spoken. If a fishy puppy partakes of his meal before grace is over, an older dog growls and gently tugs his ear.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

S.—Yorkshire is divided into three ridings, North, West, and East.

ELLA.—A marriage at a registry is as legal as a marriage at church.

TROUBLED.—A man cannot be fetched back from America for debt.

BOY.—A knot or nautical mile is 6,080 feet. An ordinary mile is 5,280 feet.

GOING OUT.—1. Sir Henry Parkes is the Prime Minister of New South Wales. 2. Yes.

ONE IN A FIX.—A landlord may double a tenant's rent by giving him proper notice of his intention.

WORKER.—An employer has no right to stop an amount out of a man's wages in order to send it to his wife.

ANXIOUS.—A lodger's goods are protected by statute against a distraint issued by the landlord of the house.

FOND OF PETS.—Cats must be kept at home; if they trespass and cannot otherwise be kept away, they may be destroyed.

DECEIVED.—1. No. 2. Affiliation proceedings must be taken within a year of the birth of the child or of the last payment by its father.

HARTLEPOOL.—1. Land tax is payable though the houses built on the land are void. 2. They are not assessed for land tax at all.

T. D.—There is no law prohibiting persons who are not solicitors or accountants from collecting debts and applying for them by letter.

FRIDGE.—If the article named is not greasy or very dirty, brush and dust it well, and rub it carefully with dry bran and bread crumbs.

DICK.—The Tishborne claimant was convicted of forgery upon two counts, and received a sentence of seven years' penal servitude for each.

D. D.—Only an experienced lawyer can give you practical information upon the subject of your inquiry. Consult one, to avoid trouble in the future.

J. E.—Only a solicitor can advise you, on seeing all the papers and facts connected with the case. We cannot advise in the choice of a professional man.

TRIX.—There is no distinction whatever between a sentence of penal servitude for life and one of penal servitude "for the term of your natural life."

HEIR.—1. If his parents are not living, his brothers and sisters take in equal shares. 2. No; that can only be done by the legally-appointed administrator.

INURED ONE.—1. A gentleman can obtain damages from a lady for breach of promise. 2. You are not obliged, but it is not usual to make any objection.

HOUSEKEEPER.—Folien is likely to become worse than the mice. There is no remedy so good as a really good cat not pampered, but compelled to feed on the vermin.

U. S.—There is nothing to prevent a President of the United States being elected to that office more than twice except the wishes and voice of a majority of the people.

DEACONES.—The Eiffel Tower, in Paris, is 904 feet high. The highest monument in the world is the Washington Monument, Washington, D. C. Height, 555 feet.

BARBER.—If the fence belongs to your neighbour he must keep it in repair; if it belongs to you, or is a joint fence, you must keep it so that your fowls cannot get through.

MARTHA.—A landlady may sell the goods which a lodger in debt for rent has left behind him; but she should, if possible, give notice to the lodger of the intended sale.

CARLO.—In order for a ship to float, its whole weight must be less than that of the same cubical extent of water. The greater the comparative lightness the higher the vessel will float.

ROBERT.—We are not able to do so. These things are not on record. Judges have so frequently made the remark that crime resulted from drunkenness that it passes without note now.

GRANDSON.—Grandchildren are not legally liable to maintain grandfather or grandmother. If the woman is on that ground refused relief, the officer who refuses should be at once reported.

F. M. E.—The name Oregon is believed to have been given by the early Spanish explorers on account of the abundance there found of the herb called by them *oregano* (wild thyme, or *Origanum*).

F. CLARKE.—1. You may take out a dog-licence anywhere. 2. No prosecution can be brought unless it can be proved that the person saw the notice. 3. There is a difference between swallows and martins.

EX-TENANT.—If the rent is calculated by the week, a week's notice; if by the month, a month's notice; and if by the year, six months' notice, to expire on the same day of the year as that on which the tenancy commenced.

NO SCHOLAR.—Job mentions the iron pen in the Bible. The Biblical pen is supposed to have been a chisel of bronze used for cutting hieroglyphics on stone or other hard substances. Who invented the first flexible iron pens, fashioned after the style with which we are so familiar, is not certainly known.

A. D.—1. If your indebtedness does not exceed £50 you can obtain an administration order from the Court; but the case seems to be one in which the creditors should be privately called together and an arrangement made. 2. It would include all debts.

APPRENTICE.—If you are under eighteen years of age you are entitled to holiday on Christmas Day, and on either Good Friday or Easter Monday, and to eight half-days in the year. You must obey orders to work on all other days, otherwise you can be summoned before the magistrates.

JANE E.—Except you have good recommendations you are not likely to be very successful. As for the advisability of application, that is a matter you must decide for yourself. If you have had no previous acquaintance with the work, and are not in good health, we should say decidedly it is advisable. We can assure you the work is neither light nor pleasant.

NEW-COMER.—If possible, you should behave like a gentleman towards your fellow-boarders. If we believed in ghostly visitations, we should say that the mysterious rapping, whereby your sleep is broken and your nights made uncomfortable, might be occasioned by the spirit of some departed washerwoman who had taken that method to avenge herself for your delinquency as to your washing bill.

PAUL.—One reason why working men in the States save money is that they spend less in drink than they do at home here. Chicago will suit you well enough. Take all your heavy clothing; your sister will be useful on the voyage, and there are "cold snaps" in the States which are more severe than anything experienced in this country. Intermediate to Chicago costs £8 10s. from port in this country.

LOOK AHEAD.

YOUTH of bright eye and smooth white brow,
So happy and exultant now,
Viewing the brilliant sky above,
Thy bosom full of faith and love—
Love on, hope on, but still reflect,
The stanchest ship is sometimes wrecked.
Clouds will obscure the brightest sky,
Fancies most prized, take wing and fly—
Weep not the past, for that is dead—
And for the future have no dread,
But look ahead!

Man of mature years, full of care,
With threads of silver in thy hair,
Fretting thyself o'er chances lost,
Thy life-bark sadly tempest-tost—
Deem not that you have lived in vain,
The chances lost may come again.
Up! up! and work! be not cast down—
The sombre clouds that on thee frown
May, ere another day has fled,
Disperse, and sunshine banish dread—
So look ahead!

Decrepit pilgrim, nearly home,
Fear not the change that soon must come—
All living walk towards the grave—
God only takes the life He gave.
Let thy thoughts dwell on things above
And rest content, for "God is Love."
Then youth, strong man, or pilgrim grey,
Remember, while ye toil to-day,
The earth at last must be thy bed,
Strive not for dress—'tis best instead
To look ahead.

ROSE.—1. We can only say that there must be no unreasonable delay. 2. A wife, although deserted for a long period by her husband, can have no claim upon her husband for maintenance if she refuses his offer to live with him again.

SKIN DEEP.—The best foundation for a good complexion is to have a clean face to begin with. Some prejudiced creatures make out that hot water relaxes the skin and brings wrinkles in its train, that cold water produces spots, that tepid water is worse than either, that people had better moss their countenances up with melted fat or cream sooner than treat them to a good scrub with soap and water, and so on.

WATCHER.—Spiders spin their threads from the back part of the body. Inside the spider's body are bags filled with a gummy substance, out of which the threads are drawn through several knobs called spinnerets, each of which is full of tubes. These gummy threads or strands, which dry as soon as they reach the air, come together, just outside the spinnerets, and form one thread, which is guided by the hind feet as it runs out of the body.

D. JAMES.—Justice requires that you should inform the young lady of your wishes in the most delicate and tender manner possible, and leave her and her friends to put an end to the engagement and to make the fact of its abrogation known to the public, in their own way and according to their own preferences. If the young lady should refuse to release you from the engagement, you would, of course, have to abide the consequences of breaking it.

MECHANIC.—We are quite sure you would not benefit yourself as far as trade is concerned by emigrating to Australia just now; this is the colonial winter, and things are at their quietest. We imagine that Sydney would be the base from which you could operate with greatest advantage, but except for the benefit to your health by the sea voyage and residence under a fine climate, we do not see that you can better yourself by going to Australia.

COLLECTOR.—Used postage-stamps are in no demand. The foolish report circulated about two years ago to the effect that great advantage of some kind would be gained by the lad who collected a million stamps set any number of people to the work, the consequence being that large collections are quite common, as, in the phrase is, "going dirt cheap." We doubt if it would pay you to spend sixpence on advertising yours, but there is really no other way of finding a purchaser.

ROMANCE.—Haroun Al-Raschid was the fifth of the caliphs of Bagdad. He was twenty-two years old when he ascended the throne. He is best known to Western readers as the hero of many of the stories of the "Arabian Nights." He is said to have been an accomplished scholar, and an excellent poet. Of his incognito walks through Bagdad the authentic histories say nothing, and little is really known of his private life and personal career, though his name is very prominent in history.

FOR INFORMATION.—1. Lightning is the result of a discharge of electricity from the clouds, which have become overcharged with the element of force. Thunder is the result of the displacement of atmosphere by the discharge of air rushing in to fill up a vacuum created. The electric discharge, or lightning, is noiseless. 2. The discharge of heavy ordnance produces a kind of thunder, so also would a volcanic eruption, or even a great earthquake; anything, in fact, that causes great atmospheric disturbance.

VERA.—No matter the rank of life, any woman, be she princess or peasant, who undertakes the care of a family becomes at once responsible for the welfare of that family, whether she actually toils for them with her own hands, as does the labourer's wife, or simply oversees and superintends the work of others, as does the rich lady in all the goods of this world. The responsibility is there, and not one can escape it without risking her own happiness and welfare, but those of all connected with her.

F. S. H.—1. Baldness is, in most cases, caused by inclination to the head through exposing it unduly to gas heat or by wearing a close hat. It is very rarely it is constitutional, coming down from father to son through many generations with the family nose or eyes or mouth; often the constitutional baldness is on the face. 2. The extent to which baldness prevails among women is not generally known, but it is undoubtedly much rarer among them than among men, owing to the special care they bestow on the head.

IN TROUBLE.—We can well understand your anxiety for an answer as to the probable result of an important surgical operation, but until the patient has been most carefully examined by the doctor himself it is quite impossible that you can have any satisfaction on the point. All we can say is, the patient is safe in the hands of the man you mention. He will not undertake an operation except he sees his way to success, and he will say at once what he thinks of the case if you visit him, probably without making any charge whatever.

BERTIE.—1. Westminster Abbey existed before the end of the eighth century, and is traced to the early part of the seventh. The larger portion of it, in its present condition, was completed in the middle of the thirteenth. 2. Soon after the Revolution the Abbey, which had been much injured during the civil war, was repaired, and the western towers were added. 3. The Abbey was originally a Benedictine monastery, founded by Sebert, King of the East Saxons, and rebuilt in the reigns of Henry III. and Edward I. 4. Not to our knowledge.

RESEARCH.—All evidence goes to show that men are bigger and healthier than they were 500 years ago. Of course, in any comparison of this kind the people who are born and reared in the slums of our large towns cannot be taken as the standard of the age a generation ago; these are as exceptional as the "seeds of corn which fall among thorns" when the farmer sows his field, and are stunted, green, and sickly, when the plants in the open are tall and vigorous. There was, perhaps, a much larger proportion of stunted people to population than there is now.

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